

How Putin and Assad Created the Islamic State



Iakovos Alhadeff

Table of Contents

[Putin and the Islamic State](#)

[Putin and Hitler](#)

[Articles](#)

Putin and the Islamic State

A very good article from Reuters about al-Nusra, the Al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria. See “Syria's Nusra Front may leave Qaeda to form new entity”, March 2015.

According to Reuters in 2015 Qatar was trying to convince al-Nusra to quit Al-Qaeda in order to start cooperating with Qatar against Assad.

Qatar is trying to bring al Nusra closer to it, but the Americans have designated al-Nusra as a terrorist organization. Qatar wants to isolate al-Nusra from Al-Qaeda, because Iran has a lot of influence in Al-Qaeda, and Qatar and Iran are fighting each other in Syria. Qatar is with Turkey and Iran is with Assad.

Iran, Sudan and Hezbollah trained Osama bin Laden's men in Sudan in the early 90s. The Arabs of Al-Qaeda i.e Saudis, Egyptians, Libyans, Sudanese, Iraqis etc, were giving money to Hezbollah, and Hezbollah was giving them training and weapons. Al-Qaeda had plenty of money and Hezbollah had plenty of expertise and weapons from Iran. See “The Al-Qaeda-Hezbollah Axis”.

Qatar would also like to convince al-Nusra not to target the Americans and the French, as al-Qaeda does, but instead focus on Assad and the Islamic State (ISIS). Note that the top people of the Islamic State are the ex-officers of Saddam Hussein, who were trained by the Soviets and KGB, who were

selling oil to Turkey, and who were hunting the Kurds of Iraq and Turkey together with the Turks. Today the Islamic State is using the same trade routes that were used by Saddam in order to sell oil to Turkey in the black market.

In September 2015 the ex-director of CIA, General Petraeus, said that maybe the United States should cooperate with the moderate elements of al-Qaeda i.e. al-Nusra in Syria, in order to fight ISIS. See Guardian “David Petraeus' bright idea: give terrorists weapons to beat terrorists”, September 2015.

The Americans still consider al-Nusra a terrorist organization, and they know that sooner or later they will have to fight al-Nusra too. But maybe they could have a limited cooperation with al-Nusra without providing it with sophisticated weapons. For example the Americans can provide air-coverage to al-Nusra when al-Nusra fights ISIS, or when al-Nusra fights Assad.

On the other hand the American Foreign Minister John Kerry said that the United States must cooperate with Russia against al-Nusra and ISIS, which means that the Russians and the Americans will jointly target al-Nusra, which is attacking Assad, and Russia will allow the Americans to attack ISIS, which is targeting the Europeans and the Americans. See CNN “Kerry: US, Russia to cooperate against al Qaeda in Syria”, July 2016.

The Russians are making it very difficult for the Americans to target ISIS. Very often the Russians say they attack the Islamic State, but they don't. They rarely target the Islamic State, mostly when they want to put Assad's

or Hezbollah's men in a post held by the Islamic State. But they are normally letting them know before they attack. Remember that the Russians and the ex-Saddam people know each other very well since the Soviet times, which is not the case with al-Nusra, which is an enemy of Russia and Assad, and that was more so from the time al-Nusra was bought by Qatar.

Putin and Assad know very well that in the Sunni part of Syria they will have some opponents, and they do not want opponents who can cooperate with NATO. ISIS and al-Qaeda are ideal opponents for Assad and Putin from this point of view, because they both target NATO too, and therefore they can be supported by the Turks and the Arabs, but they cannot be supported by NATO.

ISIS is not attacking Assad, but even if it does at some point attack him, the Americans and the French will not be able to provide ISIS with any weapons, and that's the same for al-Qaeda, which is attacking Assad though.

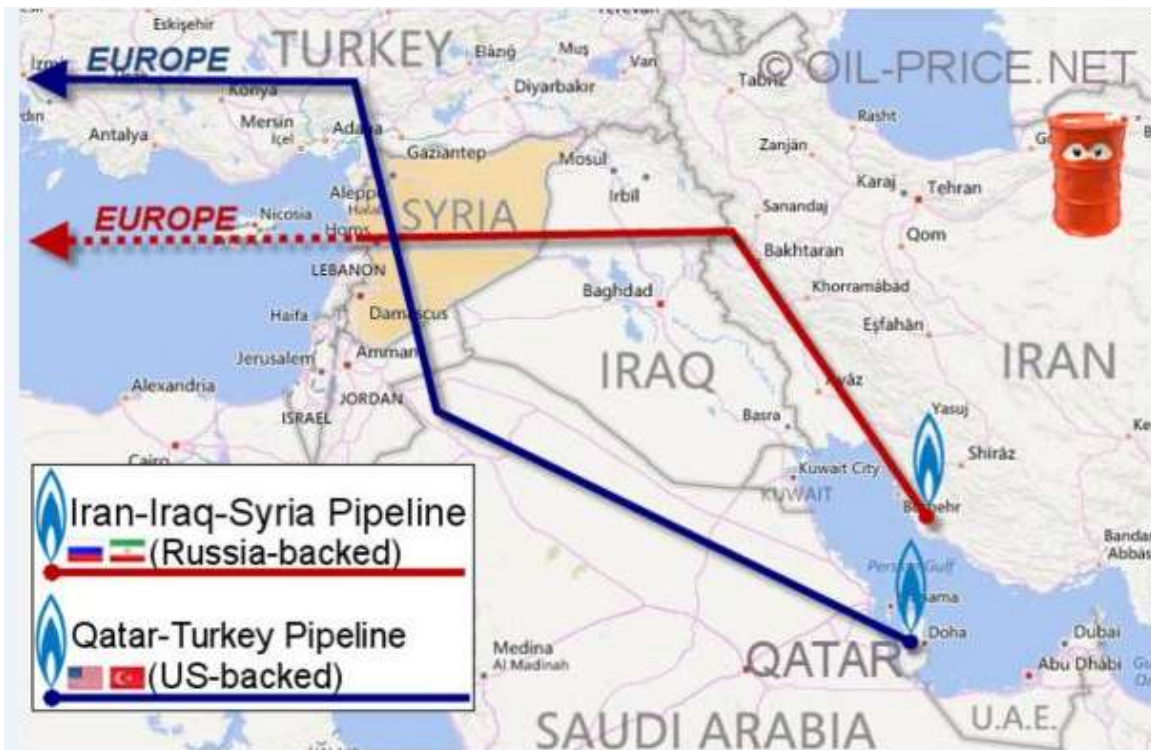
That's the reason the Russian, the Iranian, Hezbollah, al-Nusra and ISIS, all target the Syrian soldiers who are trained by NATO. They make sure that when the Arabs and the Turks fight Assad they cannot have NATO on by their side. If there was a NATO friendly opposition in Syria NATO would provide tons of weapons in order to open the Qatar-Turkey pipeline.

Note that the Qatar-Turkey Pipeline is the true pipeline. The Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline is more of a propaganda from Russia and Iran, in order to say that they have something to put in the place of the Qatar-Turkey pipeline.

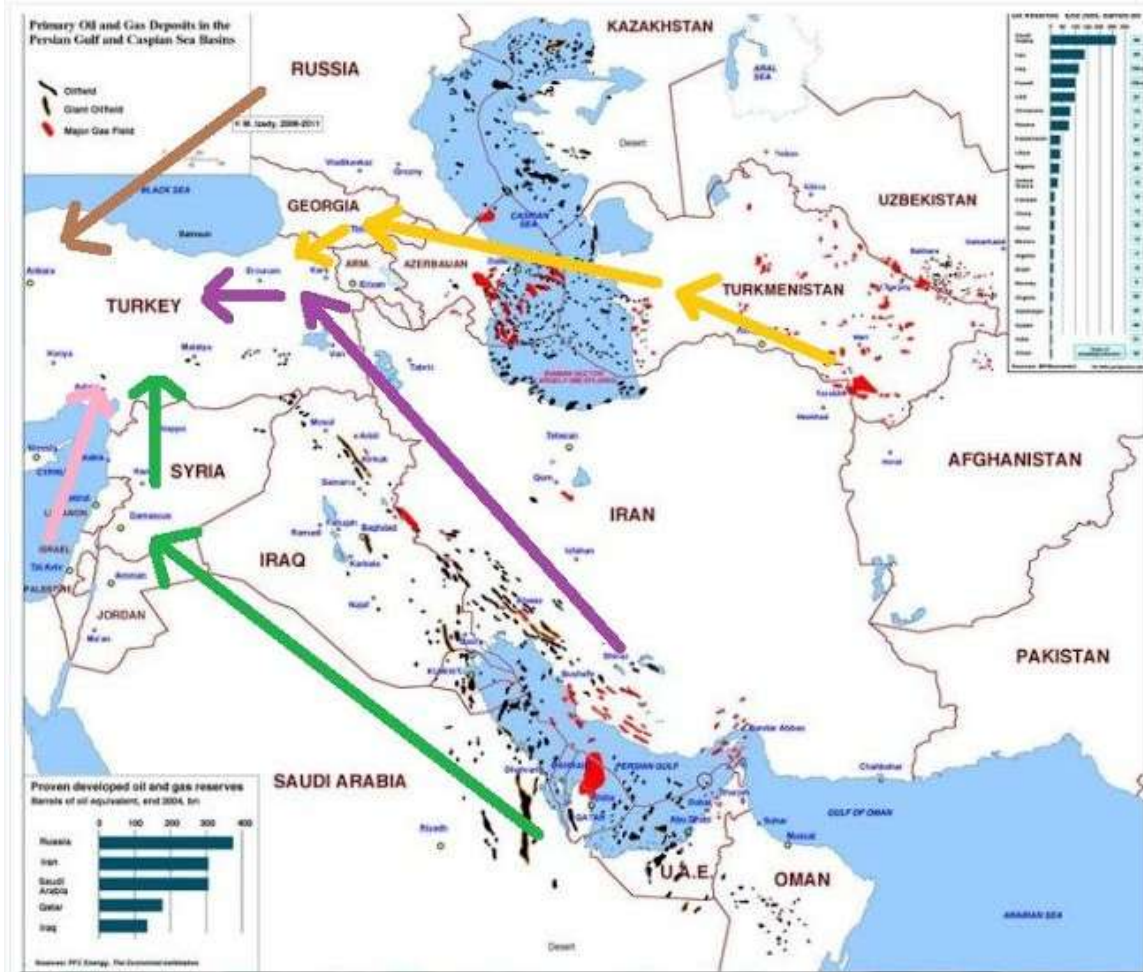
Otherwise it would be very difficult for Assad to explain to his people why he does not want the Qatar-Turkey pipeline.

The Qatar-Turkey pipeline could go straight from Qatar to Europe, while the Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline would have to liquefy the gas in Syria, then ship it to Europe with the very expensive LNG carriers, and regasify it there. That does not make economic sense. Iran can simply liquefy the gas in Iran and ship it from Iran without construction a multi-billion dollar pipeline which will be constantly sabotaged by the Arabs.

Map Sunni VS Shia Pipelines



Map Pipelines



It is not a secret that Assad and Putin helped the ex-people of Saddam Hussein to create the Islamic State. The predecessor of the Islamic State was Al-Qaeda of Iraq, which was created in 2003 by the Arabs and the Iranians to attack the Americans, when the Americans attacked Iraq without their approval. The ex-officers of Saddam were in al-Qaeda of Iraq and they were trained by the Soviet. See “Turning to Kurdistan”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2016/07/26/turning-to-kurdistan/>

When the Muslim Brotherhood attacked Assad in 2011, with the support of Turkey and Qatar, Putin and Assad supported the ex-people of Saddam

Hussein, most of whom were already in Al-Qaeda Iraq, and they created the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Two great articles which explain how Russia, Syria and Iran created the Islamic State and al-Nusra in Syria are the following:

Spiegel “The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State”, April 2015.

and

The Atlantic “The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi”, August 2006

The Spiegle is the largest European magazine, and the Atlantic is an American magazine with almost two hundred years in circulation.

The Arabs and the Iranians were supporting for years the Al-Qaeda of Iraq, because in Iraq Assad and the Arabs of the Persian Gulf were allies. But when the war in Syria broke out things got more complicated, and they found themselves in opposite sides, and there were problems with Al-Qaeda too.

The Russians, the Syrians, the Iranians and the Arabs of the Gulf had different priorities in Syria, and there was a civil war in the Jihadist who were fighting the Americas in Iraq.

In the beginning the Americans were very enthusiastic about attacking Assad in Syria, but now they have improved their relations with Iran and they are open on the Assad question, because the Iranians want Assad to stay at any cost.

In Syria the Arabs and the Turks are trying to buy as many terrorist groups as possible, whether from ISIS or al-Nusra, in order to use them against Assad. The Turks and the Arabs were not happy with the Americans, because they expected more support from NATO in Syria, and the Americans let them down, so they started supporting terrorists against Assad, even if that strained their relations with NATO.

When I say that ISIS consists of the ex-officers of Saddam Hussein I am referring to the top people and not every little group that cooperates with ISIS. At the following picture you can see the terrorist groups of Syria. They are all for hire, and groups are based on tribal or geographical connections.

Gangs of Syria

 Syrian Arab Republic and allies	 Syrian opposition and al-Qaeda network and allies	 Rojava and allies	 Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and allies
<p>Syrian government forces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Syrian Armed Forces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Syrian Arab Army Republican Guard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Syrian Marines^[1] Special Forces Command <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tiger Forces Scour al-Qadisi HRT Special Forces Division TST Special Forces Division Syrian Arab Air Force Syrian Arab Navy National Defense Force <p>Allied armed groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barth Brigades^[2] As-Sajid^[3] Syrian Social Nationalist Party^[4] Arabi Movement^[5] Arabi Nationalist Union^[6] Syrian Resistance^[7] Jaysh al-Muwahhideen^[8] Forces of Abu Ibrahim^[9] Qadisi^[10] RFU-QC^[11] Liwa Al-Quds^[12] Palestine Liberation Army^[13] Liwa Abu al-Fatih al-Akbar^[14] Liwa Fatahat^[15] Paysh Wa'at al-Sajid^[16] Fatan al-Mutadar^[17] Popular Mobilization Forces (Iraq) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bad Organization^[18] Ata'ib Al-Furqan^[19] Kata'ib Madhiyah^[20] Peace Companies^[21] DRKP-Q^[22] Houthi^[23] 	<p>Syrian opposition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Southern Front Ahrar al-Sham Jaysh al-Islam al-Rahman Legion Ahrar al-Sham Islamic League^[24] Sham Legion^[25] Syrian Turkmen Brigades Levant Free^[26] Authenticity and Development Front Army of Mujahideen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jaysh al-Furqan^[27] Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zawi Fatahat Nama Unit Jaysh al-Tahrir Northern Division^[28] 101st Infantry Division Muhamad Hawthi Brigade 13th Division 16th Division^[29] al-Murabitun Brigade^[30] Victory Brigades Jaysh al-Khalid^[31] Arabi al-Sham 1st Infantry Brigade 1st Coastal Division Ahmad al-Abdo Martyrs Forces Children Brigades Jabhat Amir al-Islam Liwa Ahrar Soudya Jaysh al-Sunna Jaysh Uslul al-Shariyah Central Division Ahrarun Brigades^[32] 33rd Regiment^[33] Front al-Arabi al-Qadisi^[34] Martyr Bad Yaturun Brigades^[35] Army of Companions^[36] Rudhah Revolutionary Brigade^[37] 	<p>Syrian Democratic Forces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People's Protection Units (YPG) Women's Protection Units (YPJ) Shammar tribe militia^[38] Al-Senshat Forces Egyptians Militia J. Army of Revolutionaries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Sun Battalion Jabhat al-Akhdar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sajid Brigade^[39] Liwa Thawar al-Rqqad Jaysh al-Salam Front Jarabulus New Syrian Forces Liwa al-Mujahid Brigade Group of Al-Jazeera Al-Gharab tribe militia^[40] Syrian Military Council (MSF)^[41] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sekemath Women Protection Forces^[42] Martyr Turkmen Brigade^[43] <p>Police forces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asayish^[44] Sabqa^[45] <p>Civilian defense units</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-Defense Forces (SDF)^[46] Civilian Defense Force (CDF)^[47] <p>Other military units</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Terror Units (ATU)^[48] Autonomous Protection Force^[49] <p>Allied armed groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ar-Ruhayya Brigade^[50] Kurdistan Workers' Party <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People's Defense Forces Free Women's Units Operational Freedom Battalion^[51] MJL^[52] 	<p>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Military of ISIL Khaldun al-Walid Army^[53] Norfolk Martyrs Brigade^[54] Islamic Mahdawi Movement^[55] Jaysh al-Madad^[56] Chikhat^[57] Jamaat Bayt al-Madina al-Islamiya^[58] Ahrar al-Akhdar

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_armed_groups_in_the_Syrian_Civil_War

When the Americans conquered Iraq in 2003, they dissolved the army of Saddam Hussein, which was a Sunni army, in order for the Shia majority of Iraq (65%) to build a Shia army and run the country. The Saddam officers, who had been fighting the Americans for decades, and who were trained by the Soviets, were beaten in the war and later they were fired too. They really hated the Americans. Many of them joined al-Qaeda Iraq, and later on Putin and Assad used them to create the Islamic State, in order to have an enemy that could not align with NATO. You really need to read the Spiegel article. It is a great article.

By creating ISIS Assad and Syria were not hopping to create a friend. They knew they were creating an enemy. But since they could not create a friend in Sunni Syria they created an enemy that NATO could not supply with arms.

The Iranians, for the same reasoning that Assad and Putin did, supported Al-Qaeda in Syria. The Iranians knew that eventually al-Qaeda would attack them in Syria, and it did it when al-Nusra was bought by Qatar, but they knew the Americans could not supply al-Qaeda in Syria with weapons that would be used against Assad.

The Turks, very disappointed by NATO, did not recognize al-Nusra as a terrorist organization, even though they knew how sensitive the Americans are with al-Qaeda. The Turks did that because al-Nusra was also killing Syrian Kurds, and because they wanted to pay the Americans back for not recognizing the Syrian Kurds (YPG) as a terrorist organization.

In 2014 the Turks recognized al-Nusra as a terrorist organization, but later it was mainly with al-Nusra that the Turks and the Qataris would attack Assad. Terrorism is always state funded, and it is a living organism. It changes whenever international relations change. People think that the Americans are funding the terrorists, but it is the Islamists, the Russians and the communist dictators of Latin America who are funding terrorists. The Americans have a very powerful army. They don't need terrorism. The weaker parties need terrorism.

The United States now have two choices. They will have to cooperate with Russia, in order for Russia to let them fight al-Nusra and ISIS in Syria, which has been Russia's back yard for the last decades, or they will have to send army in Syria, in order to attack Russia and Assad. The American political system is divided.

But what you should keep in mind is that the main enemy of Putin and Assad is not the Islamic State but al-Nusra. The Islamic State might become their enemy at some point, but for the moment the Islamic State does not attack Assad, and therefore it does not support the Qatar-Turkey pipeline. Moreover the the Islamic State makes the Americans very reluctant in providing arms to the opposition, because these arms might end up in the hands of ISIS as many times has happened in the past few years.

I must also say that the Arabs and the Turks were initially united against Assad, but at some point there was a divide between Turkey and Qatar on one hand, and Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates on the other, because the Turks and the Qataris were supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, which is a threat for Saudi Arabia. Therefore the Turkey and Saudi Arabia started fighting each other in Syria.

In Syria Saudi Arabia can communicate with Russia because Saudi Arabia does not care much about natural gas. At least not as much as Turkey and Qatar do. But in 2015, with the new Saudi King, the Turks and the Saudis reached an agreement, and the Saudi King accepted a role for the Muslim Brotherhood in the Syrian opposition.

You have to remember that Assad is very important for Turkey and Qatar. Qatar and Turkey do not care too much about ISIS. But ISIS is very important for the United States. The United States care a lot more about ISIS than they care about Assad, especially after they reached a deal with Iran about the Iranian nuclear program.

Putin and Hitler

I want to say one last thing. One of the articles that follow says that the alliance between Putin and ISIS is like the alliance between the Nazis and the Communists in 1939, and at some point they are going to stab each other in the same way the Nazis stabbed the Communists in 1941. See “Bashar al-Assad and the Devil’s Endgame”, September 2015.

Image Hitler and Stalin – The Nazi-Communist Alliance of 1939



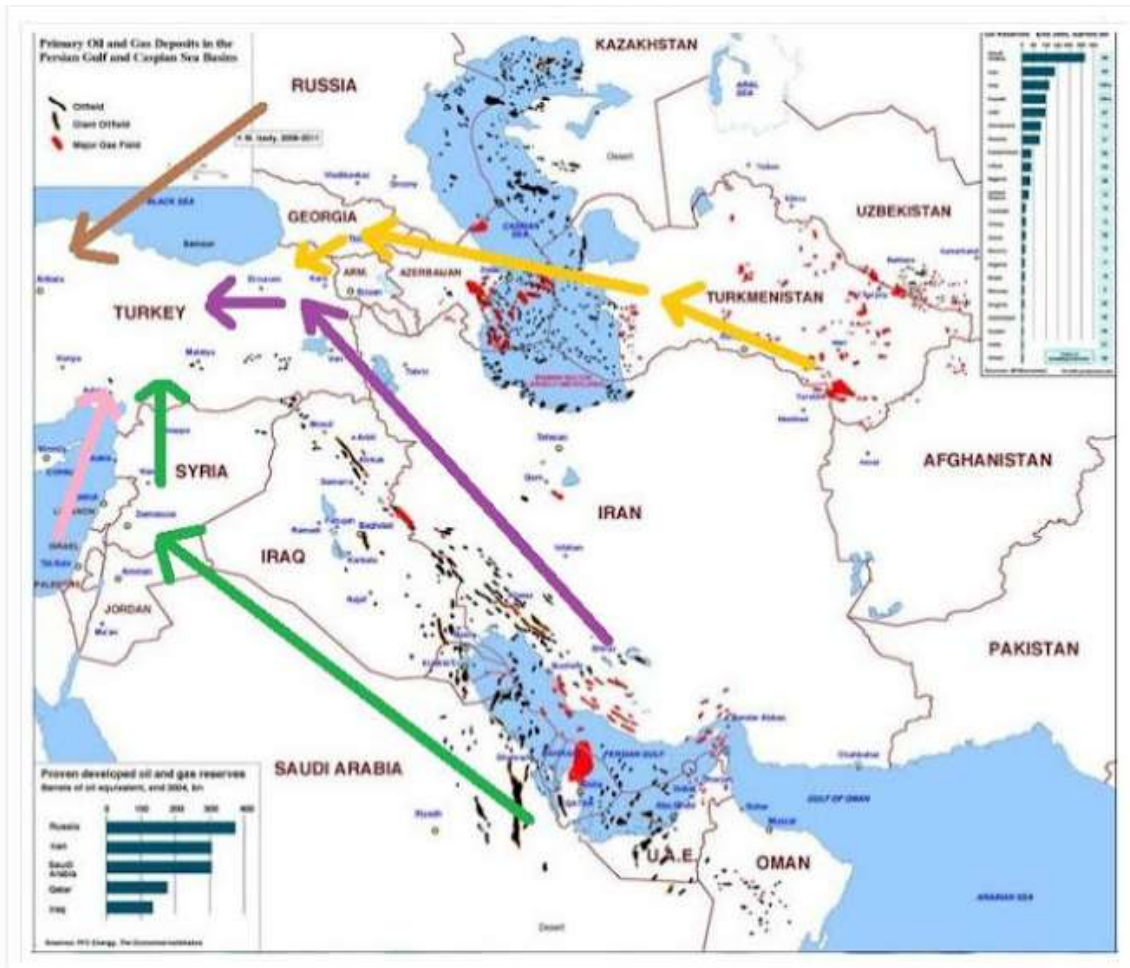
I think what the article says is correct, because geography will not change. Syria will still be a corridor in the future. Putin and Assad spread ISIS on Syria and they did block NATO for now. But ISIS and the Turks might join their forces against Russia at some point. Erdogan is not very different from ISIS. He played it nice to bring Turkey in the European Union, in order to do demographic Jihad.

But look what he did once the Germans and the French did not let him in. He cooperates with the Greek Communists in order to flood Europe with Muslim illegal immigrants. He wants to do violent demographic Jihad. See “Germany’s Defeat by the Turkish Islamists and the Greek Communists”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2015/12/08/germanys-defeat-by-the-turkish-islamists-and-the-greek-communists/>

Erdogan and ISIS will always want to send the natural gas of the Persian Gulf to Europe. If at some point they feel strong enough they will bite Russia.

Map The War for the Pipelines



Maybe Putin plans to quickly destroy the European Union, maybe with the help of Donald Trump, in order to go ahead with the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, and one of the South Stream or the Turk Stream pipeline.

Now the European Energy Union blocks the Russian pipelines because they violate the anti-monopolistic rules of the EU. If Russia builds these two pipelines maybe there will be no economic sense for the Qatar-Turkey and the Trans-Saharan pipelines, and then Putin might lethally attack ISIS. Maybe that's how he is thinking about it. But if the European Union brakes the French and the Germans might go to a war.

On the other hand If Hilary is elected she is thinking about bringing the American army in Syria, which still might cause a war.

These are interesting times.



Articles

“Syria's Nusra Front may leave Qaeda to form new entity”, March 2015

Leaders of Syria's Nusra Front are considering cutting their links with al Qaeda to form a new entity backed by some Gulf states trying to topple President Bashar al-Assad, sources said.

Sources within and close to Nusra said that Qatar, which enjoys good relations with the group, is encouraging the group to go ahead with the move, which would give Nusra a boost in funding.

The exercise could transform Nusra from a weakened militia group into a force capable of taking on Islamic State at a time when it is under pressure from bombing raids and advances by Kurdish and Iraqi military forces.

It could also boost the influence of Qatar and its allies in the campaign to oust Assad, in line with the Gulf state's growing diplomatic ambitions in the region. Qatari officials were not available for comment.

While it awaits the final word from its decision-making Shoura council, Nusra is not wasting time. It has turned on small non-jihadi groups, seizing their territory and forcing them to disarm so as to consolidate Nusra's power in northern Syria and pave the way for the new group.

Intelligence officials from Gulf states including Qatar have met the leader of Nusra, Abu Mohamad al-Golani, several times in the past few months to encourage him to abandon al Qaeda and to discuss what support they could provide, the sources said.

They promised funding once it happens.

"A new entity will see the light soon, which will include Nusra and Jaysh al Muhajereen wel Ansar and other small brigades," said Muzamjer al-Sham, a prominent jihadi figure who is close to Nusra and other Islamist groups in Syria.

"The name of Nusra will be abandoned. It will disengage from al Qaeda. But not all the Nusra emirs agree and that is why the announcement has been delayed," said Sham.

A source close to the foreign ministry confirmed that Qatar wanted Nusra to become a purely Syrian force not linked to al Qaeda.

"They are promising Nusra more support, i.e. money, supplies etc, once they let go of the Qaeda ties," the official said.

The Qatari-led bid to rebrand Nusra and to provide it with new support could further complicate the war in Syria as the United States prepares to arm and train non-jihadist rebels to fight Islamic State.

The Nusra Front is listed as a terrorist group by the United States and has been sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council. But for Qatar at least, rebranding Nusra would remove legal obstacles to supporting it.

FIGHTING ISLAMIC STATE

One of the goals of the new entity would be to fight Islamic State, Nusra's main competitor in Syria. IS is led by Iraqi jihadi Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who helped create Nusra before falling out with Golani.

Once the most powerful group fighting Assad, Nusra was weakened when most of its commanders and fighters left with Baghdadi to form Islamic State. IS then killed many of Nusra's remaining leaders, confiscated its weapons, forced its commanders to go underground and seized its territory.

But recently Islamic State has come under pressure from air strikes by a U.S.-led coalition. It has also lost ground to Kurdish fighters in Syria and to the Iraqi armed forces. But the group is far from collapse.

But if Nusra splits from al Qaeda, some hope that with proper funding, arming and training, fighters from the new group will be able to tackle Islamic State.

Jihadi sources said that Golani suggested to the group's Shoura Council that it should merge with Jaysh al-Muhajereen wel Ansar, a smaller jihadi group composed of local and foreign fighters and led by a Chechen commander.

The announcement has been delayed due to objections from some of Nusra's leaders who reject the idea of leaving al Qaeda. But this was seen as unlikely to stop Golani.

"He is going to do it, he does not have a choice. Those who are not happy can leave," said a Nusra source who backs the move.

It seems Golani is already establishing the ground.

Nusra wants to use northern Syria as base for the new group. It launched offensives against Western-backed groups who have been vetted by the U.S. to receive military support.

In the northern province of Idlib it seized territory from the Syria Revolutionaries' Front led by Jamal Maarouf, forcing him to flee. Last week it went after another mainstream group, Harakat Hazzm in Aleppo province, forcing it to dissolve itself.

The U.S. State Department said the end of Harakat Hazzm would have an impact on the moderate opposition's capabilities in the north.

But if Nusra is dissolved and it abandons al Qaeda, the ideology of the new entity is not expected to change. Golani fought with al Qaeda in Iraq. Some other leaders fought in Afghanistan and are close al Qaeda chief Ayman Zawahri.

"Nusra had to pledge loyalty to Sheikh Zawahri to avoid being forced to be loyal to Baghdadi but that was not a good idea, it is time that this is abandoned," said a Nusra source in Aleppo. "It did not help Nusra and now it is on the terrorist list," he said.

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-nusra-insight-idUKKBN0M00G620150304>

“David Petraeus' bright idea: give terrorists weapons to beat terrorists”, 2015

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/02/david-petraeus-bright-idea-give-terrorists-weapons-to-beat-isis>

“Russia not planning to send troops to fight ISIS in Syria – Putin’s spokesman”, 2015

1, 2 Paragraphs

“No, this isn’t being discussed in any way. This issue isn’t on the agenda,” Peskov told reporters on Tuesday when asked about the possibility of Russian military involvement in Syria.

The press-secretary also told the media that Syrian President Bashar Assad, had never asked his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, to send troops to battle IS (formerly ISIS/ISIL).

<https://www.rt.com/news/311583-russia-troops-syria-is-is/>

“Nusra Front split from al-Qaeda 'imminent', sources claim”, May 2015

1st-8th Paragraphs

The Nusra Front will imminently announce an official split from al-Qaeda, several sources confirmed on Monday.

Opposition activists in southern Syria have told Middle East Eye that they expect the news to be announced very soon, with Arabic media reports suggesting that the group's leader Abu Mohammad al-Jolani will now make a very rare appearance to signal his independence from the militant group.

Sources within Nusra, one of the most effective anti-government factions in Syria's civil war, said that the new group would change its name to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. They also stressed the group would lose access to al-Qaeda funds, although analysts have disputed the claims.

Mohamed Okda, an expert on Syrian issues who has been involved in negotiating with Syrian groups, told MEE that the money would keep flowing because the bulk of the group's funding came from private Gulf donors who would not abandon the Syrian cause as Nusra was unlikely to renounce its ideological heritage.

“Nusra is doing this to force the other rebel groups like Ahrar [al-Sham] and others into a corner, and push them into joining the new Shami front that Nusra will announce,” Okda told MEE.

“They might be severing relations with al-Qaeda as an organisation,” he said, adding that he knows both foreign and Arab al-Nusra Front fighters.

“[But] they are not breaking up with the ideology of al-Qaeda. [They are] firm believer[s] of al-Qaeda ideology, and a firm believer of attacking the West. They have huge respect for [former leader Osama] Bin Laden. So the separation is not ideological, it's organisational.”

Rumours of a split have been circulating since Saturday when Charles Lister, a Syrian analyst, tweeted that Nusra's Shura Council had voted to sever its ties with al-Qaeda, although Nusra's official media channels have yet to comment.

They come amid reports of a supposed pact between the US, which supports elements of the Syrian opposition, and Russia, which supports Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, to target Nusra alongside the Islamic State (IS) group. Nusra split from IS in 2014.

11-14th Paragraphs

It has also clashed with other opposition rebel groups, especially those they view as having received American support.

A noted researcher of Islamic militancy told MEE that he believed the reports of a split were credible and that the move had been approved by al-Qaeda leaders.

"Nothing definitively confirms it but the impression I am getting is that this is something being done with al-Qaeda's approval," said Aymenn al-Tamimi, research fellow at the Middle East Forum, a US think-tank.

Tamimi said the split was likely driven by the threat of the new US-Russia agreement to target the group inside Syria and had been orchestrated with a local audience in mind.

<http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/nusra-front-split-al-qaeda-imminent-sources-claim-411085001>

"Kerry: US, Russia to cooperate against al Qaeda in Syria", July 2016

1-3 Paragraphs

Secretary of State John Kerry said Friday that the U.S. and Russia had agreed to cooperate in Syria against the al Nusra Front, al Qaeda's Syrian branch, in an effort to "restore the cessation of hostilities, significantly reduce the violence and help create the space for a genuine and credible political transition" in Syria.

But Kerry, appearing alongside Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow, declined to provide details of the cooperation, saying "the concrete steps that we have agreed on are not going to be laid out in public in some long list because we want them to work."

Proposals to deepen military cooperation with Russia in Syria have sparked a rift at the highest levels of the Obama administration, with the Pentagon openly challenging the idea that Russia could be trusted to uphold its end of the bargain.

7 Paragraph

The agreement does not necessarily pertain to ISIS, with the draft saying that each country would reserve the right to strike ISIS independently.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/15/politics/kerry-us-russia-syria-al-nusra/>

“New Russian Air Defenses in Syria Keep U.S. Grounded”, December 2015

2

Russia’s military operations inside Syria have been expanding in recent weeks, and the latest Russian deployments, made without any advance notice to the U.S., have disrupted the U.S.-led coalition's efforts to support Syrian rebel forces fighting against the Islamic State near the Turkey-Syria border, just west of the Euphrates River, several Obama administration and U.S. defense officials told us. This crucial part of the battlefield, known inside the military as Box 4, is where a number of groups have been fighting the Islamic State for control, until recently with overhead support from U.S. fighter jets.

5

"The increasing number of Russian-supplied advanced air defense systems in Syria, including SA-17s, is another example that Russia and the regime seek to complicate the global counter-Daesh coalition’s air campaign,” said Major Tim Smith, using another term for the Islamic State.

The increasing number of Russian air defense systems further complicate an already difficult situation over the skies in Syria, and do nothing to advance the fight against the Islamic State, which has no air force, Smith said. He added that Russia could instead be using its influence with the regime to press President Bashar al-Assad to cease attacking civilians. “Unhelpful actions by Russia and the Syrian regime will not stop coalition counter-Daesh operations in Syria, nor will such actions push the coalition away from specific regions in Syria where Daesh is operating,” said Smith.

8, 9

In Washington, top officials are debating how to respond to Russia's expanded air defenses, said another administration official who was not authorized to discuss internal deliberations. The administration could decide to resume flights in support of the rebels fight Islamic State, but that could risk a deadly incident with the Russian military. For now, the U.S. seems to be acquiescing to Russia's effort to keep American manned planes out of the sky there and "agree to their rules of the game," the administration official said.

With U.S. planes out of the way, Russia has stepped up its own airstrikes along the Turkey-Syria border, and the Obama administration has accused it of targeting the rebel groups the U.S. was supporting, not the Islamic State. The Russian strikes are also targeting commercial vehicles passing from Turkey into Syria, the administration official told us. The Washington Post reported that the Russian strikes have resulted in a halt of humanitarian aid from Turkey as well.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2015-12-17/new-russian-air-defenses-in-syria-keep-u-s-grounded>

“Russia, Turkey and the rise of the Islamic State”, December 2015

Turkey concluded its biggest investigation to date into Islamic State (IS) operatives on its territory on Friday, and blacklisted 67 people. This provides a good moment to review what Turkey's role has been in the rise of IS, especially amid the escalating accusations from Russia that Turkey is significantly responsible for financing IS. The reality is that while Turkish policy has, by commission and omission, made IS stronger than it would otherwise have been, so has Russia's policy - and Russia's policy is far more cynical than Turkey's, deliberately intended to empower extremists to discredit the rebellion against Bashar al-Assad.

Turkey's focus on bringing down Assad and Ankara's fear of Kurdish autonomy led it into these policies, and now, having seemingly found the will to act to uproot IS's infrastructure on Turkish territory, there is the problem of actually doing so, when IS can (and has) struck inside Turkey. The concerns about these external funding mechanisms for IS, while doubtless important, obscure the larger problem: IS's revenue is

overwhelmingly drawn from the areas it controls and only removing those areas of control can deny IS its funds.

Turkey shot down a Russian jet on 24 November, the first time since 1952 a NATO member had brought down a Russian military aircraft. Ankara claimed that its airspace had been violated and that numerous requests to withdraw were ignored. The Russian plane landed in northern Syria: one pilot, Oleg Peshkov, was killed in the descent by the Turkoman rebels of Alwiya al-Ashar (The Tenth Brigade) and one, Konstantin Murakhtin, was later rescued. In the wake of this, Moscow took retribution with economic sanctions against Turkey, including limiting tourism and banning charter flights to Turkey and also trade in certain foodstuffs.

Russia's ruler, Vladimir Putin, then raised the stakes on 30 November by accusing Turkey of perpetrating the shoot-down in order to protect IS, with which the Turkish government has commercial interests, notably oil but also weapons. Moscow subsequently accused Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of being a personal profiteer from the criminal trade in oil with IS. The reality is quite otherwise, of course. As David Butter of Chatham House put it, given Turkey's reliance on Russia for energy, "if oil was a consideration for the Turkish authorities ... it would have had good reason to hold fire."

Russia attempted to buttress its claims of an IS-Ankara oil trade by having its Ministry of Defence publish a map, among other "evidence," purporting to show the three border crossings through which this trade takes place.

The problem is that not a single one of the border crossings is controlled by IS. Bab al-Hawa in Idlib is controlled by rebels at war with IS; Hasaka is controlled by a mix of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) that Turkey is bombing inside Syria and the Assad regime; and Zakho is in Iraqi Kurdistan, where IS has been unable to penetrate. After forces led by the PYD, the Syrian branch of the PKK, pushed IS out of Tal Abyad in June, the only border crossing left solely to IS is Jarabulus.

Worse, from Russia's perspective, Moscow's accusations against Turkey were not only untrue but had the feel of projection. IS sells nearly half of its oil to Russia's client, the Assad regime, through Russian businessmen, and Russian weapons bound for the regime are a "top source" of IS weaponry.

Russia has also helped the Assad regime in its efforts to strengthen extremist forces to overpower the nationalist rebels, including by sending IS fighters from the Caucasus to the Fertile Crescent and most recently by preventing US air strikes against IS in northern Aleppo while bombing the rebels fighting against IS, essentially providing IS with air cover.

That said, it is true that Turkey has pursued policies that have strengthened IS, driven primarily by the desire to see Assad overthrown - and finding that the United States was effectively on the other side, Turkey had to go it alone. From 2011 until shortly after IS stormed into Mosul in mid-2014, Turkey maintained effectively an open border with Syria. Anecdotal reports abounded of visibly foreign jihadi-Salafists heading for IS-held areas of Syria via Turkey being waved through customs.

There was a Turkish crackdown against IS later in 2014, with border crossings closed and some vetting taking place of who was crossing between Syria and Turkey; some would-be IS holy warriors were even arrested. Turkey, however, still has not closed down a 60-mile stretch of its 565-mile border with Syria that is held by IS.

And the accusation that IS is - or at least, was - trading oil in Turkey is undoubtedly true. In October 2014, David Cohen, the US undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, gave a speech in which he said: "According to our information, as of last month, ISIL [IS] was selling oil at substantially discounted prices to a variety of middlemen, including some from Turkey, who then transported the oil to be resold.

"It also appears that some of the oil emanating from territory where ISIL operates has been sold to Kurds in Iraq, and then resold into Turkey. And in a further indication of the Assad regime's depravity, it seems the Syrian government has made an arrangement to purchase oil from ISIL. ... We estimate that beginning in mid-June, ISIL has earned approximately \$1 million a day from oil sales."

The evidence is that by late 2014 and early 2015, under the pressure of the US-led coalition airstrikes, IS's oil income was severely diminished. But IS's oil revenue appears to have crept back up later in 2015. Treasury sanctions at the end of September 2015 disclosed that Sami al-Jabouri, an Iraqi who had been IS's shari'a council chief and deputy in southern Mosul, was IS's supervisor of oil and gas, antiquities, and mineral resources operations beginning in April 2015.

At that time al-Jabouri had, in collaboration with Fathi at-Tunisi (Abu Sayyaf), IS's "oil minister," "worked to establish a new funding stream for ISIL from increased production at oil fields held by the organisation" (italics added). It might well be that IS's oil income is now decreasing again: US military officials said at the beginning of December that over the previous 30 days, more than 40 percent of IS's income from oil had been "affected".

As to official Turkish complicity in the IS oil trade, the first direct evidence that this had occurred came in May 2015 when at-Tunisi was struck down by a US Special Forces raid, and captured data provided some details:

"[At-Tunisi] was almost unheard of outside the upper echelons of the terror group, but he was well known to Turkey. From mid-2013, the Tunisian fighter had been responsible for smuggling oil from Syria's eastern fields ... and Turkish buyers were its main clients. ... One senior Western official familiar with the intelligence gathered at the slain leader's compound said that direct dealings between Turkish officials and ranking Isis members was now 'undeniable'."

"There are hundreds of flash drives and documents that were seized there," the official told the Observer. "They are being analysed at the moment, but the links are already so clear that they could end up having profound policy implications for the relationship between us and Ankara."

Still, whatever was previously the case, the current level of oil transactions between IS and people even in Turkey is believed to be minimal, not least because IS's ability to refine fuel has been reduced by the air strikes and there is little market for crude oil in Turkey. There is also the fact, though, that Turkey has "clamped down on key supply routes" to IS:

"Long before Islamic State took root in Iraq and Syria, local smugglers ferried oil, gas and other supplies in and out of Turkey. ... For a small cut of the action ... poorly paid border officials in the region sometimes looked the other way. But ... Turkey started stepping up its campaign against oil smuggling from Syria in 2012 ... In 2014, according to Turkish government officials, efforts intensified ... The operations 'suffocated the illegal fuel trade,' said one official in the Hatay provincial governor's office. ..."

"Turkey has doubled the number of troops on the Syrian border to 20,000, erected hundreds of miles of razor-wire fencing, installed powerful floodlights and dedicated 90% of its drone flights to border surveillance, according to one Turkish government official. ... "It's like the US-Mexican border, where, despite America's war on drugs and all its preventative enforcement, narcotics from Mexico continue to enter the country," the Turkish government official said. ...

"US officials dismissed Mr Putin's allegations that Turkey was backing Islamic State ... as unfounded. ... One former US government official who worked with Turkey on efforts against Islamic State also challenged the Russian claims. 'We knew that there was illicit oil smuggling activity along the Turkish border, but Turkey was actively seeking to contain the smuggling,' the official said."

There had been and to an extent remains a question about Turkey's willingness to challenge IS's operations on its soil given IS's boasted-of capacity to inflict "civil and economic chaos" inside Turkey, something that need not be doubted given the precarious state of sectarian relations in Turkey for many years. With Turkey's need for tourist dollars and its government relying on economic growth for legitimacy as it imposes some ugly authoritarian strictures, this was a serious threat.

Not all of this can be blamed on Turkey's recent policies - some of the networks IS is using to smuggle oil across borders date back to the Saddam Hussein regime's effort to evade the sanctions - but it is clear that Turkey has laid the foundations for what would be called, if it happened to Westerners, "blowback".

Well-placed Western observers have worried about the "level of ... support" for IS among the Syrian refugees in Turkey, and Syrian rebels at war with IS have noted that IS "has many spies ... in Turkey, and not just spies but killers". The full force of that fact was brought home at the end of October when an IS spy who had infiltrated Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently (RBSS), the activist group working in IS-held areas to expose the caliphate's crimes, murdered two RBSS journalists, Fares Hammadi and Ibrahim Abd al-Qader, in Turkey.

The IS terrorist strikes - the 6 January suicide bombing in Istanbul, which "only" killed one person; the 5 June bomb attack on the Kurdish rally in Diyarbakir that murdered four people; the bombing of the largely Kurdish peace rally in Suruc on 20 July in which

33 people perished; and finally the bombing at the Ankara railway station on 10 October that massacred 102 people, essentially Turkey's 9/11 - do seem to have stiffened Turkish resolve. When Turkey concluded its investigation two days ago, it is notable that of the three named major IS agents operating on Turkish soil, two had already been arrested. Halis Bayancuk (Abu Hanzala), a senior IS leader based in Istanbul, was rounded up in late July, and Asaad Khelifalkhadr (Abu Suhayf), a key provider of logistics and supplies to IS foreign fighters arriving in Turkey, had also been taken into custody (admittedly on charges related to his fake passport rather than terrorism, though this seems to be more an Anatolian Al Capone strategy than Turkey soft-peddling the criminal case against Khelifalkhadr.)

The man still at large, Ilyas Aydin, is undoubtedly more important than the other two - he is IS's leader in Turkey - but one has to assume he got the position on some kind of merit, so it is hardly surprising he should have proven more elusive. Dismantling the networks IS established inside Turkey while the government effectively turned a blind eye will be a massive undertaking, even with the will to do so.

As the conflict has worn on, another fact has become salient: Turkey fears the internal effects of a Kurdish State on its border more than the caliphate. The Turks joined the anti-IS coalition in August, but it quickly became apparent that Turkey's primary goal was constraining the PYD/PKK, against which the majority of its force was targeted.

Ankara had been spooked by the PYD linking up their Jazira canton with Kobani in June by punching across northern Raqqa Province, and has made clear that any effort by the PYD to move west of the Euphrates River and connect with the Efrin canton will trigger a direct military response. One of IS's great survival skills has been to make itself an enemy of everybody and priority of nobody.

Some of the most serious accusations against Turkey to date are of direct support, in the form of weaponry supplied by Turkish intelligence, to Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Syria). Turkey's support has helped make Ahrar a-Sham, the most extreme majority-Syrian insurgent group that has links to al-Qaeda, one of the most powerful forces in northern Syria. Turkey has not been coy about this.

During an effort to construct a unified list of vetted insurgents, the US used a colour code: green (trusted allies), red (enemies), and yellow (those somewhere in the middle).

America put Nusra and Ahrar in the red category; Ankara put Nusra and Ahrar in the yellow category, “gambling that they could build a moderate rebel force by nudging groups in the middle toward the green, friendly category”.

Despite American protestations, “We ultimately had no choice but to agree to disagree,” said Francis Ricciardone, the US ambassador to Turkey until August 2014. Moreover, since the formation earlier this year of Jaysh al-Fatah, an insurgent coalition that includes both Nusra and Ahrar, Turkey has openly provided it support. In short, Turkey’s government has a deeply problematic view of the insurgent landscape in Syria, quite apart from its view of and policies toward IS.

So Turkey has played an unhelpful role in IS’s rise. But the problem with saying that Turkey - or Saudi Arabia, or Qatar - is really behind IS is not just distortion; it’s intellectual laziness. The wish is father to the thought; if IS is just being bankrolled by some nefarious foreign actor, then the solution is simply to shut down the funding and watch IS wither. Unfortunately, defeating IS will not be that simple.

Smuggling to the outside world, including through Turkey, of oil and antiquities, has been important, as has been the importation of foreign fighters, who have no social connections to the local areas and thus no compunction in obeying orders to commit the most appalling atrocities that help to suppress any inkling the population might have to revolt. The foreigners are largely unskilled and get used as suicide bombers and cannon fodder, but as Stalin noted: quantity has a quality all its own.

And there really are underexplored areas of IS’s finances. Nibras Kazimi had a very interesting [investigative report](#) recently on the possible earnings IS was receiving from money laundering through Iraq’s banking system - a revenue stream in amounts to dwarf anything being talked about from oil - and the unwillingness of the Iraqi political class to tackle this because unravelling IS’s holdings would unravel everybody else’s and potentially leave people vulnerable to charges of funding terrorism.

There is also the problem that Iran, the real power behind the throne in Baghdad, uses the same system to help finance its own operations, notably the war against the Syrian population.

But, helpful as all these revenue streams are, focus on them obscures the self-sustaining nature of IS’s statelet.

In terms of weapons, IS has gained some weapons from careless shipments to the Syrian rebels and even confiscated some weapons from rebels, but these are negligible. IS's weapons are largely taken from the Iraqi military, as well as from the Assad regime directly and the above-mentioned Russian and Iranian weapons shipments to the regime. There is no credible evidence that Saudi Arabia has ever funded IS - nor Qatar, come to that, despite the clear funding Doha provides to Hamas and Ahrar, and the deniable mechanisms Qatar at least has operated in letting supplies get to Nusra. Foreign donors do contribute to IS, but the amount they contribute has never mattered: between 2005 and 2010 - which includes the period when IS was at its absolute nadir, driven from controlling any territory, forced underground, and its leadership shattered - documents show that IS never received more than five percent of its budget from abroad. IS has only gained in strength since then, gathering to itself the real source of its wealth: captive populations.

The population over which IS's 80,000-square-mile statelet rules is estimated at around 10 million. The extraction of zakat from the population and a sophisticated system of "taxes" - extortion - charges the population on everything from agricultural profits and livestock to the jizya (poll tax) against non-Muslims and the confiscation of property and assets of people marked as IS's enemies.

Destroying the caliphate's finances, effectively and sustainably, means denying it control of territory. Any other conclusion is an attempt to circumvent the difficult task of finding a way to roll back IS's territorial control.

<http://www.middleeasteye.net/essays/russia-turkey-and-rise-1639783717>

“The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State”, April 2015

1, 2, 3

Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khelifawi was the real name of the Iraqi, whose bony features were softened by a white beard. But no one knew him by that name. Even his best-known pseudonym, Haji Bakr, wasn't widely known. But that was precisely part of the plan. The former colonel in the intelligence service of Saddam Hussein's air defense force had been

secretly pulling the strings at IS for years. Former members of the group had repeatedly mentioned him as one of its leading figures. Still, it was never clear what exactly his role was.

But when the architect of the Islamic State died, he left something behind that he had intended to keep strictly confidential: the blueprint for this state. It is a folder full of handwritten organizational charts, lists and schedules, which describe how a country can be gradually subjugated. SPIEGEL has gained exclusive access to the 31 pages, some consisting of several pages pasted together. They reveal a multilayered composition and directives for action, some already tested and others newly devised for the anarchical situation in Syria's rebel-held territories. In a sense, the documents are the source code of the most successful terrorist army in recent history.

5

For the first time, the Haji Bakr documents now make it possible to reach conclusions on how the IS leadership is organized and what role former officials in the government of ex-dictator Saddam Hussein play in it. Above all, however, they show how the takeover in northern Syria was planned, making the group's later advances into Iraq possible in the first place. In addition, months of research undertaken by SPIEGEL in Syria, as well as other newly discovered records, exclusive to SPIEGEL, show that Haji Bakr's instructions were carried out meticulously.

8

The story of this collection of documents begins at a time when few had yet heard of the "Islamic State." When Iraqi national Haji Bakr traveled to Syria as part of a tiny advance party in late 2012, he had a seemingly absurd plan: IS would capture as much territory as possible in Syria. Then, using Syria as a beachhead, it would invade Iraq.

21

It seemed as if George Orwell had been the model for this spawn of paranoid surveillance. But it was much simpler than that. Bakr was merely modifying what he had learned in the past: Saddam Hussein's omnipresent security apparatus, in which no one, not even generals in the intelligence service, could be certain they weren't being spied on.

24 , 25 , 26

In 2010, Bakr and a small group of former Iraqi intelligence officers made Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the emir and later "caliph," the official leader of the Islamic State. They reasoned that Baghdadi, an educated cleric, would give the group a religious face.

Bakr was "a nationalist, not an Islamist," says Iraqi journalist Hisham al-Hashimi, as he recalls the former career officer, who was stationed with Hashimi's cousin at the Habbaniya Air Base. "Colonel Samir," as Hashimi calls him, "was highly intelligent, firm and an excellent logistician." But when Paul Bremer, then head of the US occupational authority in Baghdad, "dissolved the army by decree in May 2003, he was bitter and unemployed."

Thousands of well-trained Sunni officers were robbed of their livelihood with the stroke of a pen. In doing so, America created its most bitter and intelligent enemies. Bakr went underground and met Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Anbar Province in western Iraq. Zarqawi, a Jordanian by birth, had previously run a training camp for international terrorist pilgrims in Afghanistan. Starting in 2003, he gained global notoriety as the mastermind of attacks against the United Nations, US troops and Shiite Muslims. He was even too radical for former Al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden. Zarqawi died in a US air strike in 2006.

28 , 29 , 30

Bakr gradually became one of the military leaders in Iraq, and he was held from 2006 to 2008 in the US military's Camp Bucca and Abu Ghraib Prison. He survived the waves of arrests and killings by American and Iraqi special units, which threatened the very existence of the IS precursor organization in 2010, Islamic State in Iraq.

For Bakr and a number of former high-ranking officers, this presented an opportunity to seize power in a significantly smaller circle of jihadists. They utilized the time they shared in Camp Bucca to establish a large network of contacts. But the top leaders had already known each other for a long time. Haji Bakr and an additional officer were part of the tiny secret-service unit attached to the anti-aircraft division. Two other IS leaders were from a small community of Sunni Turkmen in the town of Tal Afar. One of them was a high-ranking intelligence officer as well.

In 2010, the idea of trying to defeat Iraqi government forces militarily seemed futile. But a powerful underground organization took shape through acts of terror and protection

rackets. When the uprising against the dictatorship of the Assad clan erupted in neighboring Syria, the organization's leaders sensed an opportunity. By late 2012, particularly in the north, the formerly omnipotent government forces had largely been defeated and expelled. Instead, there were now hundreds of local councils and rebel brigades, part of an anarchic mix that no one could keep track of. It was a state of vulnerability that the tightly organized group of ex-officers sought to exploit.

42, 43

True to Haji Bakr's plan, the phase of infiltration was followed by the elimination of every person who might have been a potential leader or opponent. The first person hit was the head of the city council, who was kidnapped in mid-May 2013 by masked men. The next person to disappear was the brother of a prominent novelist. Two days later, the man who had led the group that painted a revolutionary flag on the city walls vanished. "We had an idea who kidnapped him," one of his friends explains, "but no one dared any longer to do anything." The system of fear began to take hold. Starting in July, first dozens and then hundreds of people disappeared. Sometimes their bodies were found, but they usually disappeared without a trace. In August, the IS military leadership dispatched several cars driven by suicide bombers to the headquarters of the FSA brigade, the "Grandsons of the Prophet," killing dozens of fighters and leading the rest to flee. The other rebels merely looked on. IS leadership had spun a web of secret deals with the brigades so that each thought it was only the others who might be the targets of IS attacks.

47, 48

Until the end of 2013, everything was going according to Islamic State's plan -- or at least according to the plan of Haji Bakr. The caliphate was expanding village by village without being confronted by unified resistance from Syrian rebels. Indeed, the rebels seemed paralyzed in the face of IS' sinister power.

But when IS henchmen brutally tortured a well-liked rebel leader and doctor to death in December 2013, something unexpected happened. Across the country, Syrian brigades -- both secular and parts of the radical Nusra Front -- joined together to do battle with Islamic State. By attacking IS everywhere at the same time, they were able to rob the

Islamists of their tactical advantage -- that of being able to rapidly move units to where they were most urgently needed.

52, 53, 54, 55, 56

Haji Bakr stayed behind in the small city of Tal Rifaat, where IS had long had the upper hand. But when rebels attacked at the end of January 2014, the city became divided within just a few hours. One half remained under IS control while the other was wrested away by one of the local brigades. Haji Bakr was stuck in the wrong half. Furthermore, in order to remain incognito he had refrained from moving into one of the heavily guarded IS military quarters. And so, the godfather of snitching was snitched on by a neighbor. "A Daish sheik lives next door!" the man called. A local commander named Abdelmalik Hadbe and his men drove over to Bakr's house. A woman jerked open the door and said brusquely: "My husband isn't here."

But his car is parked out front, the rebels countered.

At that moment, Haji Bakr appeared at the door in his pajamas. Hadbe ordered him to come with them, whereupon Bakr protested that he wanted to get dressed. No, Hadbe repeated: "Come with us! Immediately!"

Surprisingly nimbly for his age, Bakr jumped back and kicked the door closed, according to two people who witnessed the scene. He then hid under the stairs and yelled: "I have a suicide belt! I'll blow up all of us!" He then came out with a Kalashnikov and began shooting. Hadbe then fired his weapon and killed Bakr.

When the men later learned who they had killed, they searched the house, gathering up computers, passports, mobile phone SIM cards, a GPS device and, most importantly, papers. They didn't find a Koran anywhere.

58

Haji Bakr's state continued to work even without its creator. Just how precisely his plans were implemented -- point by point -- is confirmed by the discovery of another file. When IS was forced to rapidly abandon its headquarters in Aleppo in January 2014, they tried to burn their archive, but they ran into a problem similar to that confronted by the East German secret police 25 years earlier: They had too many files.

63, 64 , 65 , 66, 67, 68, 69

But in the first months of 2014, yet another legacy from Haji Bakr began playing a decisive role: His decade of contacts to Assad's intelligence services.

In 2003, the Damascus regime was panicked that then-US President George W. Bush, after his victory over Saddam Hussein, would have his troops continue into Syria to topple Assad as well. Thus, in the ensuing years, Syrian intelligence officials organized the transfer of thousands of radicals from Libya, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia to al-Qaida in Iraq. Ninety percent of the suicide attackers entered Iraq via the Syrian route. A strange relationship developed between Syrian generals, international jihadists and former Iraqi officers who had been loyal to Saddam -- a joint venture of deadly enemies, who met repeatedly to the west of Damascus.

At the time, the primary aim was to make the lives of the Americans in Iraq hell. Ten years later, Bashar Assad had a different motive to breathe new life into the alliance: He wanted to sell himself to the world as the lesser of several evils. Islamist terror, the more gruesome the better, was too important to leave it up to the terrorists. The regime's relationship with Islamic State is -- just as it was to its predecessor a decade prior -- marked by a completely tactical pragmatism. Both sides are trying to use the other in the assumption that it will emerge as the stronger power, able to defeat the discrete collaborator of yesterday. Conversely, IS leaders had no problem receiving assistance from Assad's air force, despite all of the group's pledges to annihilate the apostate Shiites. Starting in January 2014, Syrian jets would regularly -- and exclusively -- bomb rebel positions and headquarters during battles between IS and rebel groups.

In battles between IS and rebels in January 2014, Assad's jets regularly bombed only rebel positions, while the Islamic State emir ordered his fighters to refrain from shooting at the army. It was an arrangement that left many of the foreign fighters deeply disillusioned; they had imaged jihad differently.

IS threw its entire arsenal at the rebels, sending more suicide bombers into their ranks in just a few weeks than it deployed during the entire previous year against the Syrian army. Thanks in part to additional air strikes, IS was able to reconquer territory that it had briefly lost.

Nothing symbolizes the tactical shifting of alliances more than the fate of the Syrian army's Division 17. The isolated base near Raqqa had been under rebel siege for more

than a year. But then, IS units defeated the rebels there and Assad's air force was once again able to use the base for supply flights without fear of attack.

But a half year later, after IS conquered Mosul and took control of a gigantic weapons depot there, the jihadists felt powerful enough to attack their erstwhile helpers. IS fighters overran Division 17 and slaughtered the soldiers, whom they had only recently protected.

72, 73, 74

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi may be the officially named leader, but it remains unclear how much power he holds. In any case, when an emissary of al-Qaida head Ayman al-Zawahiri contacted the Islamic State, it was Haji Bakr and other intelligence officers, and not al-Baghdadi, whom he approached. Afterwards, the emissary bemoaned "these phony snakes who are betraying the real jihad."

Within IS, there are state structures, bureaucracy and authorities. But there is also a parallel command structure: elite units next to normal troops; additional commanders alongside nominal military head Omar al-Shishani; power brokers who transfer or demote provincial and town emirs or even make them disappear at will. Furthermore, decisions are not, as a rule, made in Shura Councils, nominally the highest decision-making body. Instead, they are being made by the "people who loosen and bind" (ahl al-hall wa-l-aqd), a clandestine circle whose name is taken from the Islam of medieval times.

Islamic State is able to recognize all manner of internal revolts and stifle them. At the same time, the hermitic surveillance structure is also useful for the financial exploitation of its subjects.

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-files-show-structure-of-islamist-terror-group-a-1029274.html>

“The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi”, 2006

1,2,3,4

On a cold and blustery evening in December 1989, Huthaifa Azzam, the teenage son of the legendary Jordanian-Palestinian mujahideen leader Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, went to

the airport in Peshawar, Pakistan, to welcome a group of young men. All were new recruits, largely from Jordan, and they had come to fight in a fratricidal civil war in neighboring Afghanistan—an outgrowth of the CIA-financed jihad of the 1980s against the Soviet occupation there.

The men were scruffy, Huthaifa mused as he greeted them, and seemed hardly in battle-ready form. Some had just been released from prison; others were professors and sheikhs. None of them would prove worth remembering—except for a relatively short, squat man named Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al-Khalaylah.

He would later rename himself Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Once one of the most wanted men in the world, for whose arrest the United States offered a \$25 million reward, al-Zarqawi was a notoriously enigmatic figure—a man who was everywhere yet nowhere. I went to Jordan earlier this year, three months before he was killed by a U.S. airstrike in early June, to find out who he really was, and to try to understand the role he was playing in the anti-American insurgency in Iraq. I also hoped to get a sense of how his generation—the foreign fighters now waging jihad in Iraq—compare with the foreign fighters who twenty years ago waged jihad in Afghanistan.

9

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, barely forty and barely literate, a Bedouin from the Bani Hassan tribe, was until recently almost unknown outside his native Jordan. Then, on February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell catapulted him onto the world stage. In his address to the United Nations making the case for war in Iraq, Powell identified al-Zarqawi—mistakenly, as it turned out—as the crucial link between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime. Subsequently, al-Zarqawi became a leading figure in the insurgency in Iraq—and in November of last year, he also brought his jihadist revolution back home, as the architect of three lethal hotel bombings in Amman. His notoriety grew with every atrocity he perpetrated, yet Western and Middle Eastern intelligence officials remained bedeviled by a simple question: Who was he? Was he al-Qaeda's point man in Iraq, as the Bush administration argued repeatedly? Or was he, as a retired Israeli intelligence official told me not long ago, a staunch rival of bin Laden's, whose importance the United States exaggerated in order to validate a link between al-Qaeda and pre-war Iraq, and to put a non-Iraqi face on a complex insurgency?

Everyone I spoke with readily acknowledged that as a teenager al-Zarqawi had been a bully and a thug, a bootlegger and a heavy drinker, and even, allegedly, a pimp in Zarqa's underworld. He was disruptive, constantly involved in brawls. When he was fifteen (according to his police record, about which I had been briefed in Amman), he participated in a robbery of a relative's home, during which the relative was killed. Two years later, a year shy of graduation, he had dropped out of school. Then, in 1989, at the age of twenty-three, he traveled to Afghanistan.

22, 23, 24

"He was an ordinary guy, an ordinary fighter, and didn't really distinguish himself," Huthaifa Azzam said of al-Zarqawi's first time in Afghanistan. "He was a quiet guy who didn't talk much. But he was brave. Zarqawi doesn't know the meaning of fear. He's been wounded five or six times in Afghanistan and Iraq. He seems to intentionally place himself in the middle of the most dangerous situations. He fought in the battles of Khost and Kardez and, in April 1992, witnessed the liberation of Kabul by the mujahideen. A lot of Arabs were great commanders during those years. Zarqawi was not. He also wasn't very religious during that time. In fact, he'd only 'returned' to Islam three months before coming to Afghanistan. It was the Tablighi Jamaat [a proselytizing missionary group spread across the Muslim world] who convinced him—he had thirty-seven criminal cases against him by then—that it was time to cleanse himself."

A Jordanian counterterrorism official expanded on al-Zarqawi's time in Afghanistan for me. "His second time in Afghanistan was far more important than the first. But the first was significant in two ways. Zarqawi was young and impressionable; he'd never been out of Jordan before, and now, for the first time, he was interacting with doctrinaire Islamists from across the Muslim world, most of them brought to Afghanistan by the CIA. It was also his first exposure to al-Qaeda. He didn't meet bin Laden, of course, but he trained in one of his and Abdullah Azzam's camps: the Sada camp near the Afghan border inside Pakistan. He trained under Abu Hafs al-Masri." (The reference was to the nom de guerre of Mohammed Atef, an Egyptian who was bin Laden's military chief and, until he was killed in an American air strike in Afghanistan in November 2001, the No. 3 official in al-Qaeda.)

Abu Muntassir Bilah Muhammad is another jihadist who spent time fighting in Afghanistan and who would later become one of the co-founders of al-Zarqawi's first militant Islamist group. "Zarqawi arrived in Afghanistan as a zero," he told me, "a man with no career, just floundering about. He trained and fought and he came back to Jordan with ambitions and dreams: to carry the ideology of jihad. His first ambition was to reform Jordan, to set up an Islamist state. And there was a cachet involved in fighting in the jihad. Zarqawi returned to Jordan with newfound respect. It's not so much what Zarqawi did in the jihad—it's what the jihad did for him."

26

*But perhaps as important as anything else, it was in Afghanistan that al-Zarqawi was introduced to Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (whose real name is Isam Muhammad Tahir al-Barqawi), a revered and militant Salafist cleric who had moved to Zarqa following the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Kuwait in the aftermath of the Gulf War. The Salafiya movement originated in Egypt, at the end of the nineteenth century, as a modernist Sunni reform movement, the aim of which was to let the Muslim world rise to the challenges posed by Western science and political thought. But since the 1920s, it has evolved into a severely puritanical school of absolutist thought that is markedly anti-Western and based on a literal interpretation of the Koran. Today's most radical Salafists regard any departure from their own rigid principles of Islam to be heretical; their particular hatred of Shiites—who broke with the Sunnis in 632 A.D. over the question of succession to the Prophet Muhammad, and who now constitute the majority in Iran and Iraq—is visceral. Over the years, al-Maqdisi embraced the most extreme school of Salafism, closely akin to the puritanical Wahhabism of Saudi Arabia, and in the early 1980s he published *The Creed of Abraham*, the single most important source of teachings for Salafist movements around the world. Al-Maqdisi would become al-Zarqawi's ideological mentor and most profound influence.*

28, 29

Al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi left Afghanistan in 1993 and returned to Jordan. They found it much changed. In their absence the Jordanians and the Israelis had begun negotiations that would lead to the signing of a peace treaty in 1994; the Palestinians had signed the Oslo Accords of 1993; and the Iraqis had lost the Gulf War. Unemployment was up

sharply, the result of a privatization drive agreed to with the International Monetary Fund, and Jordanians were frustrated and angry. The Muslim Brotherhood—the kingdom’s only viable opposition political force, which had agreed to support King Hussein in exchange for being allowed to participate in public and parliamentary life—appeared unable to cope with the rising disaffection. Small underground Islamist groups had therefore begun to appear, composed largely of men who had fought in the Afghan jihad, and who were guided by the increasingly loud voices of militant clerics who felt the Muslim Brotherhood had been co-opted by the state.

After the two men returned home, al-Maqdisi toured the kingdom, preaching and recruiting, and al-Zarqawi sought out Abu Muntassir, who had already acquired a standing among Islamic militants in Jordan. “We talked a lot, over a couple of days,” Abu Muntassir told me. “He was still pretty much a novice, but very willing, very able, and keen to learn about Islam. I was teaching geography at the time in a government school, so it was easy for me to teach Islam as well. After some time, Zarqawi asked me to work with him in an Islamic group; al-Maqdisi was already on board. The idea was there, but it had no leadership and no name. First we called it al-Tawhid, then changed the name to Bayat al-Imam [Allegiance to the Imam]. We were small but enthusiastic—a dozen or so men. Our primary objective, of course, was to overthrow the monarchy and establish an Islamic government.”

31:32,33

In another botched operation, al-Maqdisi (according to court testimony that he denied) gave al-Zarqawi seven grenades he had smuggled into Jordan, and al-Zarqawi hid them in the cellar of his family’s home. Al-Maqdisi was already under surveillance by Jordan’s intelligence service by that time, because of his growing popularity. The grenades were quickly discovered, and the two men, along with a number of their followers, found themselves for the first time before a state security court. Al-Zarqawi told the court that he had found the grenades while walking down the street. The judges were not amused. They convicted him and al-Maqdisi of possessing illegal weapons and belonging to a banned organization. In 1994, al-Zarqawi was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. He would flourish there.

Swaqa prison sits on the southern desert's edge, sixty miles south of Amman, and its political prisoners, both Islamist and secular, are housed in four wings. Al-Zarqawi embraced prison life in the extreme—as he appears to have embraced everything. According to fellow inmates of his with whom I spoke, his primary obsessions were recruiting other prisoners to his cause, building his body, and, under the tutelage of al-Maqdisi, memorizing the 6,236 verses of the Koran. He was stern, tough, and unrelenting on anything that he considered to be an infraction of his rules, yet he was often seen in the prison courtyard crying as he read the Koran.

He was fastidious about his appearance in prison—his beard and moustache were always cosmetically groomed—and he wore only Afghan dress: the shalwar kameez and a rolled-brim, woolen Pashtun cap. One former inmate who served time with him told me that al-Zarqawi sauntered through the prison ward like a “peacock.” Islamists flocked to him. He attracted recruits; some joined him out of fascination, others out of curiosity, and still others out of fear. In a short time, he had organized prison life at Swaqa like a gang leader.

36

When Abu Rumman entered Swaqa, al-Zarqawi was in isolation following a prison brawl. “It was quite extraordinary,” Abu Rumman said. “My first glimpse of Zarqawi was when he was released. He returned to the ward as a hero surrounded by his own bodyguards. Everyone began to shout: Allahu Akhbar! By that time Zarqawi was already called the ‘emir,’ or ‘prince.’ He had an uncanny ability to control, almost to hypnotize; he could order his followers to do things just by moving his eyes.”

41, 42, 43

In 1998, three or four of al-Zarqawi's tracts were posted on the Internet, after heavy editing. Soon they came to the attention of Osama bin Laden, in Afghanistan. It was the first time he had ever heard of al-Zarqawi.

In May of the following year, Jordan's King Abdullah II—newly enthroned after the death of his father, King Hussein—declared a general amnesty, and al-Zarqawi was released from Swaqa. He had made effective use of his time there. As he had done nearly a decade before—when he befriended wealthy Saudi jihadists in Khost—he had expanded his reach and his appeal during his prison years. Among the fellow inmates he had

converted to Salafism and brought into the Bayat al-Imam were a substantial number of prisoners from Iraq.

After returning for a few months to Zarqa, al-Zarqawi left again and traveled to Pakistan. He may or may not have known that Jordan was about to declare him a suspect in a series of foiled terrorist attacks intended for New Year's Eve of 1999. The plan, which became known as the "Millennium Plot," involved the bombing of Christian landmarks and other tourist sites, along with the Radisson Hotel in Amman. Had it succeeded, it would have been al-Zarqawi's first involvement in a major terrorist attack.

45, 46, 47,48,49

In December 1999, al-Zarqawi crossed the border into Afghanistan, and later that month he and bin Laden met at the Government Guest House in the southern city of Kandahar, the de facto capital of the ruling Taliban. As they sat facing each other across the receiving room, a former Israeli intelligence official told me, "it was loathing at first sight."

According to several different accounts of the meeting, bin Laden distrusted and disliked al-Zarqawi immediately. He suspected that the group of Jordanian prisoners with whom al-Zarqawi had been granted amnesty earlier in the year had been infiltrated by Jordanian intelligence; something similar had occurred not long before with a Jordanian jihadist cell that had come to Afghanistan. Bin Laden also disliked al-Zarqawi's swagger and the green tattoos on his left hand, which he reportedly considered un-Islamic. Al-Zarqawi came across to bin Laden as aggressively ambitious, abrasive, and overbearing. His hatred of Shiites also seemed to bin Laden to be potentially divisive—which, of course, it was. (Bin Laden's mother, to whom he remains close, is a Shiite, from the Alawites of Syria.)

Al-Zarqawi would not recant, even in the presence of the legendary head of al-Qaeda. "Shiites should be executed," he reportedly declared. He also took exception to bin Laden's providing Arab fighters to the Taliban, the fundamentalist student militia that, although now in power, was still battling the Northern Alliance, which controlled some 10 percent of Afghanistan. Muslim killing Muslim was un-Islamic, al-Zarqawi is reported to have said.

Unaccustomed to such direct criticism, the leader of al-Qaeda was aghast.

Had Saif al-Adel—now bin Laden’s military chief—not intervened, history might be written very differently.

A former Egyptian army colonel who had trained in special operations, al-Adel was then al-Qaeda’s chief of security and a prominent voice in an emerging debate gripping the militant Islamist world. Who should the primary target be—the “near enemy” (the Muslim world’s “un-Islamic” regimes) or the “far enemy” (primarily Israel and the United States)? Al-Zarqawi was a near-enemy advocate, and although his obsession remained the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy, he had expanded his horizons slightly during his prison years and had now begun to focus on the area known as al-Sham, or the Levant, which includes Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and historic Palestine. As an Egyptian who had attempted to overthrow his own country’s army-backed regime, al-Adel saw merit in al-Zarqawi’s views. Thus, after a good deal of debate within al-Qaeda, it was agreed that al-Zarqawi would be given \$5,000 or so in “seed money” to set up his own training camp outside the western Afghan city of Herat, near the Iranian border. It was about as far away as he could be from bin Laden.

Saif al-Adel was designated the middleman.

In early 2000, with a dozen or so followers who had arrived from Peshawar and Amman, al-Zarqawi set out for the western desert encircling Herat. His goal: to build an army that he could export to anywhere in the world. Al-Adel paid monthly visits to al-Zarqawi’s training camp; later, on his Web site, he would write that he was amazed at what he saw there. The number of al-Zarqawi’s fighters multiplied from dozens to hundreds during the following year, and by the time the forces evacuated their camp, prior to the U.S. air strikes of October 2001, the fighters and their families numbered some 2,000 to 3,000. According to al-Adel, the wives of al-Zarqawi’s followers served lavish Levantine cuisine in the camp.

It was in Herat that al-Zarqawi formed the militant organization Jund al-Sham, or Soldiers of the Levant. His key operational lieutenants were mainly Syrians—most of whom had fought in the Afghan jihad, and many of whom belonged to their country’s banned Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood’s exiled leadership, which is largely based in Europe, was immensely important in recruiting for the Herat camp, although whether it also supplied funds remains under debate. What is clear, however, is that al-

Zarqawi's closest aide, a Syrian from the city of Hama named Sulayman Khalid Darwish—or Abu al-Ghadiyah—was considered to be, until his death last summer on the Iraqi-Syrian frontier, one of al-Zarqawi's most likely successors.

53, 54 ,55 , 56, 57, 58 , 59

At least five times, in 2000 and 2001, bin Laden called al-Zarqawi to come to Kandahar and pay bayat—take an oath of allegiance—to him. Each time, al-Zarqawi refused. Under no circumstances did he want to become involved in the battle between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. He also did not believe that either bin Laden or the Taliban was serious enough about jihad.

When the United States launched its air war inside Afghanistan, on October 7, 2001, al-Zarqawi joined forces with al-Qaeda and the Taliban for the first time. He and his Jund al-Sham fought in and around Herat and Kandahar. Al-Zarqawi was wounded in an American air strike—not in the leg, as U.S. officials claimed for two years, but in the chest, when the ceiling of the building in which he was operating collapsed on him. Neither did he join Osama bin Laden in the eastern mountains of Tora Bora, as U.S. officials have also said. Bin Laden took only his most trusted fighters to Tora Bora, and al-Zarqawi was not one of them.

In December 2001, accompanied by some 300 fighters from Jund al-Sham, al-Zarqawi left Afghanistan once again, and entered Iran.

During the next fourteen months, al-Zarqawi based himself primarily in Iran and in the autonomous area of Kurdistan, in northern Iraq, traveling from time to time to Syria and to the Ayn al-Hilwah Palestinian refugee camp in the south of Lebanon—a camp that, according to the former Jordanian intelligence official, became his main recruiting ground. More often, however, al-Zarqawi traveled to the Sunni Triangle of Iraq. He expanded his network, recruited and trained new fighters, and set up bases, safe houses, and military training camps. In Iran, he was reunited with Saif al-Adel—who encouraged him to go to Iraq and provided contacts there—and for a time, al-Zarqawi stayed at a farm belonging to the fiercely anti-American Afghan jihad leader Gulbaddin Hekmatyar. In Kurdistan he lived and worked with the separatist militant Islamist group Ansar al-Islam, ironically in an area protected as part of the “no-fly” zone imposed on Saddam Hussein by Washington.

One can only imagine how astonished al-Zarqawi must have been when Colin Powell named him as the crucial link between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime. He was not even officially a part of al-Qaeda, and ever since he had left Afghanistan, his links had been not to Iraq but to Iran.

"We know Zarqawi better than he knows himself," the high-level Jordanian intelligence official said. "And I can assure you that he never had any links to Saddam. Iran is quite a different matter. The Iranians have a policy: they want to control Iraq. And part of this policy has been to support Zarqawi, tactically but not strategically."

"In the beginning they gave him automatic weapons, uniforms, military equipment, when he was with the army of Ansar al-Islam. Now they essentially just turn a blind eye to his activities, and to those of al-Qaeda generally. The Iranians see Iraq as a fight against the Americans, and overall, they'll get rid of Zarqawi and all of his people once the Americans are out."

In the summer of 2003, three months after the American invasion, al-Zarqawi moved to the Sunni areas of Iraq. He became infamous almost at once. On August 7, he allegedly carried out a car-bomb attack at the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad. Twelve days later, he was linked to the bombing of the United Nations headquarters, in which twenty-two people died. And on August 29, in what was then the deadliest attack of the war, he engineered the killing of over a hundred people, including a revered cleric, the Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, in a car bombing outside Shia Islam's holy shrine in Najaf. The suicide bomber in that attack was Yassin Jarad, from Zarqa. He was al-Zarqawi's father-in-law.

63

Of course, no one did more to cultivate that image than al-Zarqawi himself. He committed some of the deadliest attacks in Iraq, though they still represent only some 10 percent of the country's total number of attacks. In May 2004, he inaugurated his notorious wave of hostage beheadings; he also specialized in suicide and truck bombings of Shiite shrines and mosques, largely in Shiite neighborhoods. His primary aim was to provoke a civil war. "If we succeed in dragging [the Shia] into a sectarian war," he purportedly wrote in a letter intercepted by U.S. forces and released in February 2004,

“this will awaken the sleepy Sunnis who are fearful of destruction and death at the hands of the Shia.” (The authenticity of the letter came into question almost immediately.)

65, 66, 67 , 68 69

Regardless of his growing notoriety in Iraq, al-Zarqawi never lost sight of his ultimate goal: the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy. His efforts to foment unrest in Jordan included the 2002 assassination of the U.S. diplomat Lawrence Foley, and, on a far larger scale, a disrupted plot in 2004 to bomb the headquarters of the Jordanian intelligence services—a scheme that, according to Jordanian officials, would have entailed the use of trucks packed with enough chemicals and explosives to kill some 80,000 people. Once it was uncovered, al-Zarqawi immediately accepted responsibility for the plot, although he denied that chemical weapons would have been involved.

Later that year, in October 2004, after resisting for nearly five years, al-Zarqawi finally paid bayat to Osama bin Laden—but only after eight months of often stormy negotiations. After doing so he proclaimed himself to be the “Emir of al-Qaeda’s Operations in the Land of Mesopotamia,” a title that subordinated him to bin Laden but at the same time placed him firmly on the global stage. One explanation for this coming together of these two former antagonists was simple: al-Zarqawi profited from the al-Qaeda franchise, and bin Laden needed a presence in Iraq. Another explanation is more complex: bin Laden laid claim to al-Zarqawi in the hopes of forestalling his emergence as the single most important terrorist figure in the world, and al-Zarqawi accepted bin Laden’s endorsement to augment his credibility and to strengthen his grip on the Iraqi tribes. Both explanations are true.

“From the beginning, Zarqawi has wanted to be independent, and he will continue to be,” Oraib Rantawi, the director of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies in Amman, said to me. “Yes, he’s gained stature through this alliance, but he only swore bayat after all this time because of growing pressure from Iraqis who were members of al-Qaeda. And even then he signed with conditions—that he would maintain control over Jund al-Sham and al-Tawhid, and that he would exert operational autonomy. His suicide bombings of the hotels in Amman”—in which some sixty civilians died, many of them while attending a wedding celebration—“was a huge tactical mistake. My understanding is that bin Laden was furious about it.”

The attacks, which represented an expansion of al-Zarqawi's sophistication and reach, also showed his growing independence from the al-Qaeda chief. They came only thirteen months after he had sworn bayat. The alliance had already begun to fray.

The signs were visible as early as the summer of 2005. In a letter purportedly sent to al-Zarqawi in July from Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian surgeon who is bin Laden's designated heir, al-Zarqawi was chided about his tactics in Iraq. And although some experts have cast doubt on the letter's authenticity (it was released by the office of the U.S. Director of National Intelligence), few would dispute its message: namely, that al-Zarqawi's hostage beheadings, his mass slaughter of Shiites, and his assaults on their mosques were all having a negative effect on Muslim opinion—both of him and, by extension, of al-Qaeda—around the world. In one admonition, al-Zawahiri allegedly advised al-Zarqawi that a captive can be killed as easily by a bullet as by a knife.

76

“Not at all,” he replied. “Zarqawi had the ambition to become what he has, but whatever happens, even if he becomes the most popular figure in Iraq, he can never go against the symbolism that bin Laden represents. If Zarqawi is captured or killed tomorrow, the Iraqi insurgency will go on. There is no such thing as ‘Zarqawism.’ What Zarqawi is will die with him. Bin Laden, on the other hand, is an ideological thinker. He created the concept of al-Qaeda and all of its offshoots. He feels he's achieved his goal.” He paused for a moment, then said, “Osama bin Laden is like Karl Marx. Both created an ideology. Marxism still flourished well after Marx's death. And whether bin Laden is killed, or simply dies of natural causes, al-Qaedaism will survive him.”

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/07/the-short-violent-life-of-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/304983/>

“Al-Qaeda could be preparing to launch own 'Islamic State' in Syria after exploiting world's focus on Isis”, 2016

1, 2, 3

Al-Qaeda could be preparing to declare its own sovereign state in Syria after quietly gathering strength in the shadow of the international campaign against Isis, an analyst has warned.

Charles Lister, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, said that after five years building its power base in the midst of the civil war leaders are moving to create a new “Islamic emirate”.

Writing in Foreign Policy magazine he said Jabhat al-Nusra - the al-Qaeda affiliate that was linked with Isis until a bitter split in 2013 - had been building local support and influence in its territories.

14

Researchers concluded that it had also been more successful than Isis in attracting impoverished and unemployed youths with the promise of security, education, structure and, most importantly, victory.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/al-qaeda-could-be-preparing-to-launch-own-islamic-state-in-syria-after-exploiting-worlds-focus-on-a7015461.html>

“Qatar and ISIS Funding: The U.S. Approach”, 2014

1 to 4

America views its close ally, Qatar, as a terrorist funding trouble spot. Washington has gone so far as to call the small Persian Gulf state a permissive environment for financing terrorist groups.

The United States says it does not have evidence that the government of Qatar is funding the terrorist group now known as the Islamic State (ISIS). But it does believe that private individuals in Qatar are helping to finance this group and others like it. And it thinks the Gulf state is not doing enough to stop this.

To influence Qatar's policies, the United States has employed a carrot-and-stick approach. It heaps praise on its ally for developing new anti-terrorist financing regulations, while privately discouraging and sometimes publicly admonishing its support for terrorist organizations.

Yet the fundamental problem is that America's counterterrorism agenda sometimes conflicts with what Qatar perceives to be its own political interests. Qatar's security strategy has been to provide support to a wide range of regional and international groups in order to bolster its position at home and abroad. This strategy has involved generously supporting Islamist organizations, including militant ones like Hamas and the Taliban. Allowing private local fundraising for Islamist groups abroad forms part of this approach. Closing channels of support to militant Islamists -- i.e., what Washington would like Doha to do -- would be inimical to Qatar's basic approach to its own security.

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/qatar-and-isis-funding-the-u.s.-approach>

“Sorry, America: Iran Won't Defeat ISIS for You”, 2015

1, 2 , 3 , 4, 5, 6

ISIS's persistence has led some analysts to conclude—most recently Harvard's Stephen Walt—that ISIS's “state” will be a long-term reality in the region and one that Washington may soon have to come to terms with. From developing its own currency to managing a system of governance and terror wrapped in ideological fervidity, the Islamic State certainly has shown its resilience, despite its morphing geography since it captured Mosul in the summer of 2014.

Since the finalizing of the Iranian nuclear agreement, Iran has been touted in Washington in some policy circles as the best partner in fighting ISIS. Potential common interests between Washington and Tehran—as well as Iran's military capabilities—could make Tehran an effective ally in rolling back ISIS at a time when the United States is wary to commit to another ground war in the Middle East. This assessment has three substantial blind spots:

First, Tehran's strategy in Syria and Iraq has been focused more on containing and managing ISIS than defeating it. This strategy is driven by different considerations in both countries. In Syria, ISIS is seen as an effective tool in both weakening the U.S.- and GCC-backed opposition militias and buttressing the argument that President Assad is a most amenable alternative in Syria. Iraq, on the other hand, presents a difficult balancing

act for Tehran that consists of both managing ISIS as a security threat to Iran's heartland and Iraq's Shi'a communities and avoiding empowering Sunni communities to such a degree that they could later pose a credible challenge to Iran's influence in the Iraqi state. Tehran will prefer to keep Iraq unstable until its dominant influence is assured. Iran has been less than effective in pursuing this strategy as evidenced by its recent poor performance in Al Anbar Province and its difficult recapture of Tikrit in the spring.

Second, the best partners in defeating ISIS are Sunni Arab states and communities. ISIS's resilience in the region has been sustained both by the effective use of military tactics and organizational strategy, but also, by a deepening ideological resonance amongst disenfranchised Sunnis in communities worldwide from Afghanistan to the banlieues of Paris. Without a sustained buy-in from leading Sunni states on both the governmental level and on the civil-society level to counter ISIS's ideology, the Islamic State will continue to be a feature in the region's body politic. As a senior Gulf official once noted, the responsibility of defeating ISIS isn't an American or Iranian responsibility, but the responsibility of the Muslim community worldwide to reject this violence.

Third, Iran's endgames in Iraq and Syria are in complete contrast to the United States' objectives. While Washington and Tehran may share a few common interests in weakening ISIS, Tehran is seeking to both push the United States out of the region and to curtail the influence of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. A political solution in Syria or Iraq, which gives the United States and the GCC a further foothold in these states, would be an outcome that Iran would vigorously oppose.

Washington policymakers should be wary, then, of embracing Iran as such a partner as it considers recalibrating U.S. strategy in countering ISIS.

<http://nationalinterest.org/blog/sorry-america-iran-wont-defeat-is-is-you-13407>

What ISIS Owes Iran, and Vice-Versa

http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_print=1&x_context=7&x_issue=94&x_article=3080

“Bashar al-Assad and the Devil’s Endgame”, 2015

2, 3, 4, 5

Assad’s plan, it seems, is to deliberately aid the rise of ISIS—what I call the devil’s gambit. The logic is simple and ruthless: radicalize the opposition so that the Syrian dictator looks like a lesser evil to domestic and foreign audiences. Here, Assad benefits from the inherently polarizing nature of civil war, as a cycle of atrocities and revenge pushes all sides to the extreme. He has further spurred radicalization by focusing the regime’s fire on moderate enemies, while reportedly releasing jihadists from jail and purchasing oil from ISIS. In recent months, the Syrian military allegedly used air strikes to help ISIS advance toward the city of Aleppo. Khaled Khoja, a Syrian opposition leader, claimed that Assad’s fighter jets were acting as “an air force for ISIS.”

In the widening gyre, the center cannot hold. Back in 2011, the relatively moderate Free Syrian Army seemed a plausible candidate to lead the resistance against Assad. Now the leading rebel factions include ISIS, the Islamic Front, and the al-Nusra Front, which is affiliated with al-Qaeda. The U.S. effort to train a moderate Syrian force has proved to be a pitiful and quixotic quest. After 10 months and millions of dollars, the United States has created a rebel army that is five strong. Not 5,000 strong, or 5 percent of the opposition. But literally five guys—barely enough to run a burger joint.

The tyrant and the terrorists have a symbiotic relationship. While ISIS rails against the secular regime, its focus is on building the caliphate, not getting rid of Assad. Meanwhile, ISIS’s advance in Iraq in 2014 was a godsend for the Syrian regime. The insurgents headed away from Damascus. And the group’s capture of the city of Mosul and much of Anbar province terrified the West. A reluctant Barack Obama could not accept the fall of Baghdad, and authorized extensive air strikes against ISIS.

The tyrant and the terrorists have a symbiotic relationship. While ISIS rails against the secular regime, its focus is on building the caliphate, not getting rid of Assad. Meanwhile, ISIS’s advance in Iraq in 2014 was a godsend for the Syrian regime. The insurgents headed away from Damascus. And the group’s capture of the city of Mosul and much of Anbar province terrified the West. A reluctant Barack Obama could not accept the fall of Baghdad, and authorized extensive air strikes against ISIS.

For both Western countries and Assad's Alawite constituency at home, the choice is stark: the devil you know, or a pack of rapacious demons. If Assad were to fall, the chief beneficiary would be the very Islamist forces that the United States is bombing. To be reminded of the dangers of toppling a dictator, U.S. officials need only look to Libya, where the overthrow of Muammar al-Qaddafi in 2011 led to anarchy. Assad is the TINA candidate: There is no alternative.

The devil's gambit, then, appears to have succeeded. The Obama administration has recently backed away from insisting that Assad must relinquish power, and signaled instead that the dictator could stay in power for a transitional period as part of a peace settlement.

But the key word here is "appears." As with the pact between the Nazis and the Soviets in 1939, the partners in Syria's dance of death will happily stab each other when the moment is opportune.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/assad-syria-devil-endgame-putin-obama/407635/>

"Bashar al-Assad and the Devil's Gambit", 2014

10 , 11, 12

For Assad, ISIS is priceless. The Sunni extremist boogeyman holds the key to his political survival. As ISIS continues its assault in Iraq, employing tactics that include beheadings, crucifixions, and systematic torture, Assad has cemented his alliance with Baghdad, as well as with Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia.

Even Assad's enemies are rethinking their strategy. European countries worry about the thousands of Europeans who have traveled to Syria to fight Assad—and their potential return as violent militants. Meanwhile, the United States has dispatched hundreds of advisors to join the battle against ISIS in Iraq. Members of the Obama administration are backing away from the goal of toppling Assad. "Anyone calling for regime change in Syria," said one official, "is frankly blind to the past decade; and the collapse of eastern Syria, and growth of Jihadistan, leading to 30 to 50 suicide attacks a month in Iraq."

The devil's gambit is a chancy maneuver, since the resulting radicals could grow too powerful to control. For a dictator, the sweet spot is an extremist force that's strong enough to inspire fear abroad, but not capable enough to topple the regime—which is roughly where ISIS is right now. If the militants become too potent, Assad will probably turn on them with a vengeance.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/07/assad-and-the-art-of-the-devils-gambit/374501/>

“As long as there is an Assad, there will be an Isil - he'll make sure of it”,
2015

2 , 3

So it is with Bashar al-Assad in Syria. From the very beginning of his country's insurrection, Assad has done his best to help Islamist zealots hijack the Syrian opposition; he worked particularly hard to create ideal laboratory conditions for the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isil). His supremely cynical aim was to convince the West to accept him as an essential bulwark against the very threat he helped to conjure into being. Put bluntly, Assad is an arsonist posing as a fireman.

This is an old trick. Every Arab dictator since Nasser has sought to confront his people and the world with a stark choice: either support me or watch the jihadists take over. The ruse is obvious, time-honoured – and remarkably effective.

6, 7 , 8 , 9, 10

So for as long as there is an Assad, there will be an Isil. He will make sure of it. Why? Because for as long as there is an Isil, some in the West will argue that we need Assad to defeat it.

The conclusion should be obvious: the man who needs Isil more than anyone else is not best qualified to cause their demise. Assad's role in engineering Isil's ascendancy is well-documented. Back in 2011 and 2012, he emptied Sednaya prison outside Damascus of its most dangerous Islamist prisoners. He must have known that these outlaws would use their liberty to infect the rebels with the jihadist virus – and they duly did so. An excellent

book, Isis: Inside the Army of Terror by Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, names three Isil commanders who were carefully released from Assad's jails.

Helped by the talent that the dictator had set free, Isil captured the oilfields of eastern Syria in 2013. But there is no point possessing oil unless you can sell the stuff. Fortunately for Isil, Assad bought their oil and funded their advance.

Today, Syria's regime remains the largest single buyer of Isil's oil and one of the biggest donors to the terrorists' coffers. These facts are not seriously disputed, indeed the businessman accused of negotiating the oil deals between Isil and Assad – one George Haswani, the owner of HESCO engineering – has been named and subjected to EU sanctions.

Meanwhile, observers of the war have noticed a pattern. Assad strains every sinew to fight the non-Islamist rebels, but Isil has generally been immune from his barrel bombs and poison gas. Last year, only six per cent of Assad's military operations targeted Isil, according to a study by IHS Jane's, a defence consultancy. The other rebels felt the fury of 94 per cent of Assad's military effort.

12

There is a bitter irony here. Without the threat posed by Assad's forces and Russian air power, many Sunni rebels in Syria would indeed take up arms against Isil. The way to turn them against Isil would be to stop the depredations of Assad. So the idea that the dictator is indispensable to the fight against Isil is the exact reverse of the truth. In fact, getting rid of Assad would be the key that unlocks a Sunni army to defeat the terrorists.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/12038032/As-long-as-there-is-an-Assad-there-will-be-an-Isil-hell-make-sure-of-it.html>

“How Assad helped the rise of his 'foe' Isil”, 2014

2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Logic would suggest that Mr Assad and Isil are out to destroy one another. But logic works in curious ways in the Middle East. As he wages a ruthless struggle to hold power, the evidence suggests that Mr Assad has quietly cooperated with his supposed enemies and actively helped their rise.

The thinking behind this apparently perverse strategy is simple. Mr Assad wants to force his own people and the West to make an unpalatable choice: either he stays in place, or Syria falls into the hands of Isil's fanatics. When push comes to shove, Mr Assad thinks that most Syrians and the Western powers will back him over the fundamentalists.

But this plan will only work if Isil is the most powerful rebel force. The signs are that Mr Assad has done his best to make this come true.

As recently as 2012, Isil was a marginalised movement confined to a small area of Iraq. Then Mr Assad emptied Sednaya jail near Damascus of some of its most dangerous jihadist prisoners. If he hoped that these men would join Isil and strengthen its leadership, then that aspiration was certainly fulfilled. A number of figures in the movement's hierarchy are believed to be former inmates of Syrian prisons, carefully released by the regime.

By 2013, Isil had managed to capture oilfields in eastern Syria. But to profit from these assets, they needed to find a customer for the oil. Mr Assad's regime stepped in and began buying oil from Isil, thereby helping to fund the movement, according to Western and Middle Eastern governments.

Having provided Isil with talented commanders, courtesy of his prison amnesties, and filled its coffers with oil money, Mr Assad then chose to focus his military campaign on the non-Islamist rebels. Every town and suburb held by the Free Syrian Army was relentlessly pounded from the air and ground. A year ago, the regime even used poison gas against insurgent strongholds in Damascus.

10

The signs are that Isil has returned the favour. Instead of trying to bring down Mr Assad, Isil has concentrated on fighting the non-Islamist rebels. When the movement reached what may prove to be the apex of its military strength earlier this year, Isil did not advance on Damascus and try to overthrow the regime. Instead, it chose to invade northern Iraq and trigger the current crisis.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/11051566/How-Assad-helped-the-rise-of-his-foe-Isil.html>

“Why Bashar Assad Won’t Fight ISIS”, 2015

2

The regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad has long had a pragmatic approach to the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), says a Syrian businessman with close ties to the government. Even from the early days the regime purchased fuel from ISIS-controlled oil facilities, and it has maintained that relationship throughout the conflict. “Honestly speaking, the regime has always had dealings with ISIS, out of necessity.”

7, 8, 9, 10

Assad does not see ISIS as his primary problem, the businessman says. “The regime fears the Free Syrian Army and the Nusra Front, not ISIS. They [the FSA and Nusra] state their goal is to remove the President. But ISIS doesn’t say that. They have never directly threatened Damascus.” As the businessman notes, the strikes on ISIS targets are minimal. “If the regime were serious about getting rid of ISIS, they would have bombed Raqqa by now. Instead they bomb other cities, where the FSA is strong.” That said, the businessman does not believe that the regime has a formal relationship with ISIS, just a pragmatic one. “The more powerful ISIS grows, the more they are useful for the regime. They make America nervous, and the Americans in turn see the regime as a kind of bulwark against ISIS.”

A senior Western diplomat who specializes in the Syrian civil war agrees that ISIS is seen as an asset by Assad. “They will do whatever it takes to devalue the opposition, even if it means strengthening ISIS. They know that if it comes to choosing between the black flag [of ISIS] and Damascus, the international community will choose Damascus.” And the strategy has worked extremely well. “The way it’s going now, it’s a matter of months, not even a year, that the moderate opposition is so weakened that it won’t be a factor anymore. So in just a few months from now the regime will be able to achieve its strategic goal of forcing the world to choose between Damascus and the black flags.”

So by ignoring the conflict between the Syrian opposition and the Assad regime to focus purely on ISIS may solve problems in the short term, says the diplomat, “but there will be more problems to come. These are the ingredients for a further escalation of the conflict — alienating large parts of the Sunni population, so that they have no choice but to join ISIS. Not for ideological reasons, but because they will do whatever it takes to overthrow

the regime in Damascus.” Not only that, it will widen the geographical boundaries of the conflict by making this a fight of all Sunnis. “It’s a clear recipe for further escalation well beyond the geographical boundaries of the current conflict.”

However, Damascus believes that once it has neutralized most of the opposition, it can then defeat ISIS with ease. “ISIS alone, the regime can deal with them. What Assad wants is international recognition of his legitimacy as Syria’s President,” says the businessman. “When the war is over, he can easily handle ISIS with the help of Hizballah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.”

<http://time.com/3719129/assad-isis-asset/>

“Turkey-ISIS Oil Trade”, 2015

1, 2, 3

The sale of oil products by ISIS garners about \$500 million/year. The US led multinational coalition has pledged to destroy ISIS. Its strategy includes depriving ISIS of financial support. Allegations abound that Turks are engaged in oil trade with ISIS. Additionally, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his family are allegedly implicated. Erdogan takes these charges seriously. He promised “to vacate his post of Turkey’s presidency if the claims are substantiated by concrete evidence.”

The Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights appointed a team of researchers in the United States, Europe, and Turkey to investigate the allegations. Researchers focus on secondary media sources. This research paper cites relevant reports.

Smugglers transport oil using a variety of means, generating significant revenues for ISIS. Smuggled oil finds its way into Turkey’s export facilities and onto tankers in Ceyhan bound for international markets. There is no “smoking gun” linking the Government of Turkey or Erdogan directly to ISIS oil sales. It is apparent, however, that Turkey turned a blind eye to ISIS oil trade. Turkey failed to seal its border, facilitating ISIS oil exports. Turks have profited at stages of the supply chain.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/research-paper-turkey-isis_b_8808024.html

“Islamic State oil is going to Assad, some to Turkey, U.S. official says”,
2015

1

Islamic State militants have made more than \$500 million trading oil with significant volumes sold to the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and some finding its way to Turkey, a senior U.S. Treasury official said on Thursday.

5, 6, 7

"ISIL is selling a great deal of oil to the Assad regime," Szubin, acting under secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence with the Treasury, told an audience at Chatham House in London.

"The two are trying to slaughter each other and they are still engaged in millions and millions of dollars of trade," Szubin said of Assad's government and Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

The "far greater amount" of Islamic State oil ends up under Assad's control while some is consumed internally in Islamic State-controlled areas. Some ends up in Kurdish regions and some in Turkey, he said.

11, 12

After Turkey downed a Russian fighter jet last month, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he had intelligence that large amounts of oil and petroleum products were moving across the border from Islamic State territories to Turkey.

The son of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan has denied Russian allegations that he and his family were profiting from the illegal smuggling of oil from Islamic State-held territory.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-usa-oil-idUSKBN0TT2O120151210>

“An Energy Mogul Becomes Entangled With Islamic State”, 2016

1, 2

In Syria, George Haswani sees himself as a patriot. In the West, he is a wanted man.

Mr. Haswani acts as a middleman between Islamic State and the Syrian government, the terror group's largest customer, Western security officials allege. Islamic State controls much of Syria's energy infrastructure and sells stolen oil and natural gas at a discount—even to the regime it is ostensibly battling.

7, 8

Buttressing Mr. Haswani are his strong ties to Russia. He teamed up years ago with one of President Vladimir Putin's closest associates to build the sprawling gas-production facility in Syria's Tuweinan region that caught the attention of the Obama administration.

Administration officials said Moscow's military and economic alliance with Damascus makes it clear Russia knows of the dealings between the Assad regime and Islamic State.

13

Mr. Haswani built the Tuweinan gas facility in partnership with a company owned by Gennady Timchenko, a Russian businessman and confidante of Mr. Putin's. Mr. Timchenko's firm, OAO Stroytransgaz, has provided Russian engineers for the project over the past decade, the company said.

35

The U.S. has long accused Mr. Timchenko of serving as a front for the business interests of Mr. Putin, particularly in energy. Mr. Timchenko declined to comment. He has said in the past that he was a self-made businessman, independent of the Russian leader.

37

"Timchenko's activities in the energy sector have been directly linked to Putin," the Treasury Department said at the time.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/an-energy-mogul-becomes-entangled-with-islamic-state-1462734922>

“Kerry: Assad and ISIS Have ‘Symbiotic’ Relationship”, 2014

4

The Obama administration's strategy against the Islamic State initially focused on stopping the militants' advances in Iraq but recently the U.S. and its partners have realized that without degrading ISIL's stronghold inside Syria, the group can't be defeated inside Iraq. The anti-ISIL coalition is also seeing that moderate rebel groups fighting the Islamic State and who could potentially be an alternative to Assad are facing mounting attacks by both the Syrian regime and ISIL militants.

6

Syrian rebels being trained and equipped by the CIA were routed by al Qaeda-affiliated groups including Jabhat al-Nusra, the Washington Post reported. The Free Syrian Army was losing its stronghold in the northern Syrian province of Idlib and that may complicate U.S. efforts to ramp up a program to recruit and train thousands of rebels, the Post stated. As a result, the Obama administration is assessing whether it should step up covert aid to rebels while an overt Pentagon plan to train opposition groups gets underway, the Post reported.

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/17/kerry-assad-and-isis-have-symbiotic-relationship/>

“Turkey proposes cooperation with Russia in fighting ISIS”, 2016

1, 2 , 3

Turkey has proposed cooperating with Moscow to combat ISIS in Syria, suggesting it could open its Incirlik Air Base to Russia - comments that highlight a revival in ties strained by Turkey's shooting down of a Russian warplane last year.

Moscow pledged to rebuild relations after Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan last week expressed regret over the shooting down of the aircraft, with the loss of the pilot, near the Syrian frontier. Moscow had broken off virtually all economic ties and banned tourists from visiting Turkish resorts.

“We will cooperate with everyone who fights Daesh. We have been doing this for quite a while, and we opened Incirlik Air Base for those who want to join the active fight against Daesh,” Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in an interview on state broadcaster TRT Haber on Sunday, using an Arabic acronym for ISIS.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/07/04/Turkey-proposes-cooperation-with-Russia-in-fighting-ISIS.html>

“How the Russian Fighters of ISIS Became a Terror Threat in Turkey”,
2016

2

At the time, thousands of other young men from across the former Soviet Union were flooding into Syria, mostly from the predominantly Muslim regions of southern Russia and the formerly communist states of Central Asia, such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. In the last few years, volunteers from this part of the world have distinguished themselves as some of the fiercest fighters—and some of the top commanders—in the terrorist army known as ISIS. And according to Turkish authorities, these Russian-speaking militants may now have started going on missions outside of their self-proclaimed caliphate in Syria and Iraq.

<http://time.com/4390090/istanbul-attack-russian-isis-militants/>

“ISIS is the symptom. Assad is the disease”, 2015

2 , 3

The Syrian regime has avoided large-scale fights with the Islamic State. Assad wants the Islamic State to remain an imminent threat so the international community will see two options: Keep Assad or let terrorists take over Syria. Assad created the chaos that allowed the Islamic State to rise. His regime now has a strategy that bolsters the Islamic State's hold on northern Syria: The U.S.-backed Syrian rebels who are supposed to be fighting the Islamic State are being slaughtered by the Syrian Army and by Assad's Iranian and Russian allies. Assad's brutal campaign against Sunni communities drives thousands of young Syrians to join the jihadis.

And now that the Islamic State has pulled off a series of devastating attacks in Paris, Western governments are promising a “ruthless,” “merciless,” “pitiless” war against the group. But none are mentioning Assad.

9

Assad himself tried to spin the Paris attacks into a justification for the international community to support his government. France has long been a supporter of the Syrian opposition, a policy Assad says has encouraged terrorism.

13, 14

Former White House official Dennis Ross tweeted a response: “Bashar Assad is not the answer to defeating ISIS; he helped produce them, buys their oil, is the cause that draws foreign fighters to them.”

At Saturday night's Democratic debate, each candidate promised to fight the Islamic State but none mentioned Assad. Even Republican candidates who have been staunch advocates of arming the rebels fighting Assad, such as Sen. Marco Rubio, focused their reactions to the Paris attacks on the Islamic State instead.

16

Some experts warn that even if you completely destroy the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, if Assad is allowed to continue his campaign of terror, another ruthless organization will just appear and take its place. That's why Kerry's drive to replace Assad, despite a low chance of success, is crucial.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-paris-bashar-assad-syria-islamic-state-20151116-story.html>

“Russia Needs the Islamic State to Save Assad”, Ιούνιος 2016

2η, 3η, 4η, 5η Παράγραφος

Despite Moscow's claims that its mission was fighting IS or “terrorism,” Russia's real goals can be summarized as three:

Rescue the Assad regime, which was assessed to be in mortal peril

Damage the mainstream armed opposition, especially those elements supported by the West, in order that Russia can ...

Rehabilitate the Assad regime internationally by inter alia leaving only extremists as its opponents, depriving the international community of credible interlocutors, and therefore

strengthening the Russian hand to make peace talks an instrument for re-legitimizing Assad, rather than removing him

<https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2016/06/21/russia-needs-the-islamic-state-to-save-assad/>

“Qatar bankrolls Syrian revolt with cash and arms”, 2013
1,2, 3, 4

The gas-rich state of Qatar has spent as much as \$3bn over the past two years supporting the rebellion in Syria, far exceeding any other government, but is now being nudged aside by Saudi Arabia as the prime source of arms to rebels.

The cost of Qatar's intervention, its latest push to back an Arab revolt, amounts to a fraction of its international investment portfolio. But its financial support for the revolution that has turned into a vicious civil war dramatically overshadows western backing for the opposition.

In dozens of interviews with the Financial Times conducted in recent weeks, rebel leaders both abroad and within Syria as well as regional and western officials detailed Qatar's role in the Syrian conflict, a source of mounting controversy.

The small state with a gargantuan appetite is the biggest donor to the political opposition, providing generous refugee packages to defectors (one estimate puts it at \$50,000 a year for a defector and his family) and has provided vast amounts of humanitarian support.

7

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, which tracks arms transfers, Qatar has sent the most weapons deliveries to Syria, with more than 70 military cargo flights into neighbouring Turkey between April 2012 and March this year.

9

Qatar's support for Islamist groups in the Arab world, which puts it at odds with its peers in the Gulf states, has fuelled rivalry with Saudi Arabia. Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Qatar's ruling emir, “wants to be the Arab world's Islamist (Gamal) Abdelnasser”, said an Arab politician, referring to Egypt's fiery late president and devoted pan-Arab leader.

15

A supply route across Jordan's border to southern Syria has opened up in recent months. The Jordanian government, which is terrified of jihadis getting the upper hand in its neighbour, has been reluctantly allowing Saudi deliveries.

The west's reluctance to intervene more forcefully in Syria has all but left Bashar al-Assad's opponents reliant for support on Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey though since late last year, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan have joined the rebels' backers as junior partners.

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/86e3f28e-be3a-11e2-bb35-00144feab7de.html#axzz4FN2QV1yJ>

“The Islamic State”, 2016

12

Syria's 2011 uprising gave the Islamic State new opportunities to expand. Some analysts have even described a tacit nonaggression pact between Islamic State militants and President Bashar al-Assad's regime, with each focused on fighting the main antigovernment opposition forces for territorial control. As extremists came to dominate territory in Syria's north and east and overran more moderate forces, Assad claimed it validated his argument that only his government could mount an effective opposition to “terrorists”—a term he has applied to opposition forces of all stripes.

14 , 15 , 16 , 17

After rapid expansion through Iraq in much of 2014, the Islamic State seemed to run up against its limits as it pushed up against majority Kurdish and Shia Arab regions, where it faced greater resistance from Iraqi forces and local populations, along with U.S.-led air strikes. Its militants have failed to advance on Baghdad or the Kurdish capital, Erbil. The group became an al-Qaeda franchise by 2004, but has since broken with bin Laden's organization and become its rival. The split reflects strategic and ideological differences. Al-Qaeda focused on attacking the United States and its Western allies, whom it held responsible for bolstering Arab regimes it considered apostate, like those in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, rather than capturing territory and establishing a state. Bin Laden also

envisaged the establishment of a caliphate—but for him, it was a goal for future generations.

In 2005, bin Laden deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri castigated AQI's Zargawi for indiscriminately attacking civilians, particularly Shias. Zawahiri believed that such violence would alienate Sunnis from their project. That was indeed the case, as many Sunnis allied with the government during the Awakening movement.

A more thorough rupture came after the start of Syria's uprising. Zawahiri, who succeeded bin Laden as al-Qaeda's chief, privately ruled that the emergent Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, remain independent, and Baghdadi's organization restricted to Iraq, a move Baghdadi publicly rebuffed. Since then, the two groups have at times fought one another on the Syrian battlefield

27 , 28 , 29

U.S. President Barack Obama's administration has assembled a coalition of some sixty countries to "degrade and ultimately defeat" the Islamic State, but has privately expressed frustration that many of these countries, particularly Sunni Arab states distracted by a Saudi-led conflict against Houthi rebels in Yemen, have contributed little more than rhetorical support. As of late February 2016, the coalition has carried out more than ten thousand air strikes, three-quarters of them by U.S. forces, in Iraq and Syria, the Pentagon said..

In Iraq, the United States has deployed more than three thousand uniformed personnel and armed the Kurdistan Regional Government's paramilitary, the peshmerga. Meanwhile, Shia militias known as Popular Mobilization Forces have done much of the fighting on the ground, making up for the hollowed-out Iraqi army. Those backed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps played a critical role in Iraq's March 2015 push to oust Islamic State forces from Tikrit. Another militia involved in the fight against the Islamic State is loyal to the nationalist cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, whose Mahdi Army battled U.S.-led forces early in the occupation.

The Obama administration insisted that Maliki step down and be replaced by a less polarizing politician as a condition of military assistance. His successor, Haider al-Abadi, assumed office in September 2014, pledging to practice more inclusive politics and bring Shia militias aligned with Iraqi security forces under the state's

control. But rights groups allege that these militias have evicted, disappeared, and killed residents of Sunni and mixed neighborhoods in the wake of operations to root out Islamic State militants. Acknowledging these abuses, Sadr temporarily froze his militia.

<http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state/p14811>

“Four-fifths of Russia's Syria strikes don't target Islamic State: Reuters analysis”, 2015

1, 2

Almost 80 percent of Russia's declared targets in Syria have been in areas not held by Islamic State, a Reuters analysis of Russian Defence Ministry data shows, undermining Moscow's assertions that its aim is to defeat the group.

The majority of strikes, according to the analysis, have instead been in areas held by other groups opposed to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which include al Qaeda offshoots but also fighters backed by Washington and its allies.

5, 6

"If you look at the map, you can easily understand that they are not fighting Islamic State but other opposition groups," said Alexander Golts, a Moscow-based defense columnist and deputy editor of online newspaper Yezhednevny Zhurnal.

The data supports assertions from Washington and its NATO allies that Russia's intervention in Syria, its biggest military deployment abroad since the collapse of the Soviet Union, is designed to prop up Assad, who flew to Moscow on Tuesday to thank Putin for his support.

8, 9, 10, 11

Russian officials have rejected the accusations and repeatedly stressed that they are targeting Islamic State, alongside other groups they classify as Islamist terrorists. They say Moscow and the West are fighting a common enemy.

However, the pattern of the strikes in Syria suggests a different picture.

Russia's air force has flown over 780 sorties against almost 800 targets in Syria since Sept. 30. As recently as Monday, its jets hit targets in six named locations, none of which were in areas held by Islamic State, the Reuters analysis showed.

"The main goal of these air strikes is supporting ground offensives by the Syrian army," Golts said.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-strikes-idUSKCN0SF24L20151021>

“More than 90%’ of Russian airstrikes in Syria have not targeted Isis, US says”

1, 2

A large majority of Russia’s military strikes in Syria have not been aimed at the Islamic State group or jihadists tied to al-Qaida, and have instead targeted the moderate Syrian opposition, the US State Department said on Wednesday.

“Greater than 90% of the strikes that we’ve seen them take to date have not been against Isil or al-Qaida-affiliated terrorists,” said spokesman John Kirby.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/07/russia-airstrikes-syria-not-targeting-isis>

“Putin's Target Is Not Islamic State”, 2015

1, 2 , 3

Anybody who hoped Russian President Vladimir Putin would have the key to defeating Islamic State or bringing peace to Syria just got their answer: The first airstrikes in Russia’s air campaign in that benighted country didn’t target the terrorist group at all. Instead, Putin followed President Bashar al-Assad’s playbook. The Syrian leader’s forces have rarely taken on Islamic State unless forced to do so. Indeed, Assad has seen the fanatical Islamist force as a useful ally in persuading the international community that Syria’s war consists of a choice between him and barbarians, with nothing in between. As Putin put it in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly this week, Assad is “valiantly fighting terrorism face-to-face.”

No, he is not. To create the binary choice Assad seeks, and to eliminate any opposition that the U.S. and Europe might consider acceptable, Syria’s president has directed his

fire power against rebel groups other than Islamic State, making him an ally of opportunity for the terrorist organization. By contrast, the groups that Assad attacks, and which Russia struck on Wednesday, do routinely fight Islamic State.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2015-09-30/putin-s-goal-in-syria-helping-assad-not-stopping-islamic-state>

“Putin not likely to target Islamic State soon, says Obama”, 2015

1

US president Barack Obama told a press conference in Paris that he does not expect his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, to begin targeting Islamic State (ISIS) soon, but hopes the Vienna negotiations led by secretary of state John Kerry and the Russian foreign minister Serguei Lavrov will transform the war in Syria.

7

Russia has “invested for years now in keeping Assad in power. Their presence (in Syria) is predicated on propping him up,” Mr Obama said. “I don’t think we should be under any illusions that somehow Russia starts hitting only ISIL targets. That’s not happening now. It was never happening. It’s not going to be happening in the next several weeks.”

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/us/putin-not-likely-to-target-islamic-state-soon-says-obama-1.2450687>

“Russia Launches Airstrikes Against Islamic State’s Syrian Stronghold”,
2015

1, 2, 3

U.S. defense officials said Tuesday that Russia had begun an aggressive air campaign against sites in Raqqa, the Islamic State’s stronghold in Syria, following Moscow’s acknowledgment of evidence confirming a bomb downed a Russian airliner over Egypt last month.

The Russians used sea-launched cruise missiles and long-range bombers to target Islamic State in Raqqa, according to a senior defense official.

The airstrikes represent the first significant effort by Russia to target Islamic State after announcing over the summer that it would fight the extremist group when it entered the fray in Syria.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-has-begun-airstrikes-against-islamic-states-syrian-stronghold-u-s-says-1447767698>

“Assad reportedly struck an ominous deal with ISIS to recapture Palmyra”,2016

1, 2, 3, 4 , 5 , 6

Forces loyal to Syria's President Bashar al-Assad flash victory signs and carry a Syrian national flag on the edge of the historic city of Palmyra in Homs. New documents obtained by Sky News revealed that the Syrian government's recapture of the ancient city of Palmyra from Islamic State militants was apparently part of a pre-arranged deal that allowed ISIS to remove its heavy weaponry from the city before withdrawing.

Sky News reported that the documents came from a Free Syrian Army group comprised of ISIS defectors originally from Raqqa, ISIS' de facto capital in Syria.

"Withdraw all heavy artillery and anti-aircraft machine guns from in and around Palmyra to Raqqa province," read one document that was dated just before the Syrian Arab Army recaptured Palmyra at the end of March.

Stuart Ramsay, Sky News' chief correspondent, said he asked one of the defectors if ISIS was coordinating its movements directly with forces loyal to Assad — and even with Russia, which backed the assault on Palmyra with heavy airstrikes.

"Of course," the ISIS defector told Ramsay.

8, 9, 10

The Wall Street Journal reported last month on files uncovered during a raid on the home of Abu Sayyaf, the Islamic State "oil minister" who was killed by US Special Forces at his compound in Syria's Deir Ezzour province last May. The files revealed deals the Assad regime supposedly made with Sayyaf that, at one point, contributed up to 72% of ISIS' profits from natural resources.

Abu Sayyaf's division had successfully negotiated agreements with the Assad regime to allow Islamic State trucks and pipelines to move from regime-controlled fields through territory controlled by the group, which is also known as ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh. The division helped the jihadists bring in roughly \$40 million a month in oil sales alone, according to documents seen by The Journal.

The natural-gas fields surrounding Palmyra were a particularly important source of revenue for the jihadists. They turned the gas into fuel which they then sold to Assad, according to Matthew Reed, the vice president of Foreign Reports Inc., a Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm focused on oil and politics in the Middle East.

<http://finance.yahoo.com/news/assad-regime-reportedly-struck-ominous-191347084.html>

“U.S. finds Russia focusing fight on Syrian rebels, not Islamic State Top of Form”, 2016

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Russian forces are not attacking the Islamic State in Syria unless its terrorist army is battling troops of President Bashar Assad, the U.S. military said Wednesday.

The assessment from Operation Inherent Resolve directly contradicts claims by the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin, which has repeatedly claimed its warplanes are unleashing strikes on the Islamic State, including its headquarters in Raqqa in central Syria, along with strikes on anti-Assad rebel groups backed by the West. Army Col. Seven Warren, the top U.S. military spokesman in Baghdad, said 90 percent of Russian airstrikes are directed at rebel groups opposed to Mr. Assad, a longtime Russian ally. The Assad regime has been charged with indiscriminately killing civilians with chemical weapons and, more recently, with unguided “barrel bombs.”

Col. Warren said the few strikes against the Islamic State, also known as ISIL and ISIS, occur when Russia needs to protect Mr. Assad.

Under criticism for its selective targeting practices, the Russians a month ago released a video of what it said was an airstrike on an Islamic State oil truck. But Col. Warren said there have been few if any such sorties since then.

“Ten percent, I think at the most, would be against ISIL targets,” he said.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/feb/3/putins-forces-refuse-attack-islamic-state-syria/>

“Turk Compares U.S. to Hitler”, 2004

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

The head of Turkey's parliamentary human rights group has accused Washington of genocide in Iraq and behaving worse than Adolf Hitler, in remarks that underscore the depth of Turkish opposition to U.S. policy in the region.

The U.S. Embassy rejected the comments and said they were potentially damaging to Turkish-U.S. relations.

"The occupation has turned into barbarism," the Friday edition of newspaper Yeni Safak quoted Mehmet Elkatmis, head of parliament's human rights commission, as saying. "The U.S. administration is committing genocide ... in Iraq.

"Never in human history have such genocide and cruelty been witnessed. Such a genocide was never seen in the time of the pharaohs nor of Hitler nor of [Benito] Mussolini," Italy's World War II-era fascist leader, Elkatmis said.

"This occupation has entirely imperialist aims," he was quoted as saying.

Elkatmis does not speak for Turkey's government but is a prominent member of the ruling Justice and Development Party, a center-right group with Islamist roots.

Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul played down Elkatmis' comments but defended Turks' right to speak freely.

<http://articles.latimes.com/2004/nov/27/world/fg-turkey27>

“Turkey after the Iraq War: Still a U.S. Ally?”, 2003

1

A year ago, it would have been difficult to question Turkey's status as a staunch U.S. ally. Much has changed. The Iraq war was the biggest test for the U.S.-Turkey relationship since the end of the Cold War. It followed the election of a new Turkish government in November 2002, led by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), a party rooted in

Turkey's Islamist Welfare Party. When the AKP came to power there were many questions about whether the victory marked a fundamental shift in Turkish politics. Today Turkey's political structure is changing. Significant new reforms have been implemented. Turkish citizens have gained a significant increase in rights and liberties, and the military's role in Turkish society has been reconfigured.

3, 4, 5

When I look at the factors underlying Turkey's unwillingness to open up a northern front in March 2003, I come to a pessimistic conclusion, because some of those factors still loom large. There has first of all been a move to align Turkish foreign policy with that of the European Union (EU), including Turkey's Iraq policy. That would mean there must be UN authorization before Turkey can send any peacekeepers.

From Ankara's perspective, another of Turkey's concerns -- that Iraq remain united -- was not adequately addressed before the war, and that partly undermined Turkey's ability to commit itself fully in prewar planning. The Kurdish issue remains a factor but with a new twist: the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). We have not heard much about the PKK for the last three years. It declared a ceasefire in 1999 after its leader, Abdullah Ocalan, was captured. With the ceasefire, Turkey entered a period of peace and quiet, and the PKK fell off the radar screen. Now it is back, with the September 2003 renunciation of its ceasefire. There has been a limited amount of PKK-led violence and terrorism since, though not on the previous scale. Still, now that the organization has renounced its ceasefire, it is a concern in the Turkish mind.

The PKK figures in the debate over Iraq because the organization's main base is in the northern part of that country, along the Turkish border. Northern Iraq has had weak central authority since the end of the 1991 Gulf War. The PKK uses its bases there to launch attacks into Turkey. When the organization was under ceasefire, its 4,000 to 5,000 militants in northern Iraq did not attract much attention. But now that the ceasefire has been renounced, many in Ankara believe that the PKK is Turkey's most pressing security concern.

23

These sentiments reached a peak when U.S. forces, with the help of Kurdish peshmerga fighters, captured Turkey's special forces in Sulaymaniya on July 4, 2003, and covered

their heads with hoods -- the kind of treatment usually reserved for members of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. It was ironic that NATO Supreme Commander Gen. James Jones, who was sent to resolve this unfortunate predicament, used the occasion to make a sounding as to whether Turkey could contribute forces in Iraq.

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkey-after-the-iraq-war-still-a-u.s.-ally>

“Why we shouldn’t let Russia fight the Islamic State”, 2015

1, 2

Donald Trump says: “Let [Russia] get rid of ISIS. What the hell do we care?” It is a fair question. What harm could come from letting Russian President Vladimir Putin take on this fight for us in Syria?

The answer is: plenty.

First, Russia is not fighting the Islamic State. According to the Institute for the Study of War, the Russian strikes have been mainly in areas controlled by other Sunni groups that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad sees as a threat, including rebel groups trained by and aligned with the United States. That is because Russia’s strategic goal is not to destroy the Islamic State, but to prop up the Iran-backed Assad regime — and to force the West to back him as well. By destroying the moderate opposition, the world will be left with a choice between Assad and the Islamic State. President Obama does not seem to understand this. Last week, he naively declared that Russia should not be targeting the U.S.-backed rebels because we need a moderate opposition to have a transition from Assad’s rule. That is precisely why Putin is targeting them.

Second, Russia’s intervention will actually strengthen the Islamic State. By eliminating moderate opposition, Russia is driving all Sunni groups into the arms of the Islamic State and the al-Qaeda-backed Jabhat al-Nusra — making them the only game in town for the majority of the population opposed to Assad, even if they do not share the terrorists’ radical ideology. This will radicalize the conflict and make Syria into an even greater magnet for jihadists. That helps Assad, who needs the Islamic State threat to justify his regime’s continued existence as a bulwark against them.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-we-shouldnt-let-russia-fight-the-islamic-state/2015/10/05/ad77beda-6b6c-11e5-aa5b-f78a98956699_story.html

“Why is Jabhat al-Nusra no longer useful to Turkey?”, 2014

1

Reluctantly perhaps, given the time it took it to do so, Turkey on June 3 finally designated al-Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra a terrorist organization. The decision was seen as further proof of Turkey's failed Syria policy, which has left the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan little choice but to fall in line with the United States with regard to radical groups fighting in that country.

5, 6, 7, 8

It is no secret among diplomats in Ankara that this group was initially considered by Erdogan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu as the most effective force against the Assad regime that they wanted to see toppled. Ankara was reportedly annoyed when the United States declared the group a terrorist organization in December 2012, arguing that this was a “hasty” decision, given the headway the group was making against the Syrian army.

There was also speculation that Ankara was using Jabhat al-Nusra against Kurdish groups in Syria aligned with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), to prevent them from controlling regions adjoining the Turkish border abandoned by Assad's forces.

Jabhat al-Nusra's self-declared jihadist ambitions and the brutal tactics it employed against its enemies, however, moved the UN to also blacklist it in May 2013, increasing pressure on Ankara to distance itself from the group.

11 to 23

Responding to a parliamentary question by a deputy from the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) in August 2013, Davutoglu was more direct. He referred to Jabhat al-Nusra as a group that supported extremism and which is on the US' and the UN's list of terrorist organizations.

Despite such indirect acknowledgements of Jabhat al-Nusra's status as a terrorist group, it took nine months for Ankara to finally designate it as a terrorist organization by a government decree published in the Official Gazette.

The question arises as to why the Erdogan government decided to blacklist Jabhat al-Nusra now, after having resisted doing so for so long. The simple answer seems to be that its Syria policy is in tatters, after all the horses it bet on lost one by one.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has proved to have staying power, and his latest election gambit shows that he will remain in place for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, it has become apparent that there will be no direct Western-led military intervention against the Syrian regime, which continues to get major backing from Russia and Iran.

The Erdogan government has no choice at this point but to also accept that as far as the United States and Europe are concerned, the emphasis in Syria has shifted from toppling Assad to combating the al-Qaeda-affiliated jihadist groups in that country.

Looked at in retrospect, these groups have posed the most important obstacle to Ankara's policy of pushing for international military action against Assad. They have also prevented the Syrian opposition from being armed with the necessary weapons to fight the Syrian army.

The United States and some Western countries, like France, were not averse at first to arming the Syrian opposition with sophisticated weapons. These countries even appeared willing to start a bombing campaign against Assad's forces after chemical weapons were used in that country.

They pulled back, however, not only because it could not be established conclusively who used the chemical weapons, but also because of the fear that jihadist groups could fill the political vacuum left by the Assad regime if it were to be ousted by a military intervention.

The idea of providing the Syrian opposition with heavy and sophisticated weapons was also overridden by fears that these could fall into the hands of radicals and be turned against the West in the future.

Put in a nutshell, the groups that the Erdogan government may have once seen as providing an advantage against Assad turned out in the end to be serious liabilities for

Turkey's ill-fated, and in hindsight ill-considered, Syrian policy. This liability increased after Syria-related terrorist attacks started to take place in Turkey.

The main attack of this sort, which concentrated Turkish minds and turned the public even more against the government's Syria policy, was the Reyhanli twin car bombing on May 11, 2013, which left at least 50 dead. Although the government was quick to blame Assad loyalists, the opposition in Turkey still insists that it was jihadist groups that carried out the attack.

Meanwhile, the so-called "Sunni Axis" against Syria, comprising Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, fell apart without having influenced the course of events against Assad. Today, members of this "axis" not only bear grudges against each other, but are also deeply suspicious of each other's intentions, for a variety of reasons.

This has limited Ankara's options further, and forced it not only to coordinate its Syria policy more closely with Washington, but to also remain open to fresh regional overtures from Iran, which appears the winner today, given developments in Syria and the crumbling of the "Sunni Axis."

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/06/idiz-turkey-syria-opposition-nusra-terrorist-unsc-erdogan.html>

“Obama: I don't expect Putin to do a '180' to help fight Islamic State”, 2015
1, 2

President Obama expressed fresh doubts Tuesday about Russia's willingness to turn away from a military campaign in Syria focused on “propping up” President Bashar Assad and instead joining efforts to battle Islamic State, saying that he doesn't expect a “180 turn” in the near future.

“I don't think we should be under any illusions that somehow Russia starts hitting only ISIL targets,” Obama said, using his administration's preferred term for Islamic State. “That's not happening now. It was never happening. It's not going to be happening in the next several weeks.”

<http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-obama-russia-turkey-isis-20151201-story.html>

“Syria's al-Nusra 'more dangerous' than ISIS”, 2016

1 , 2, 3 , 4

Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, is a greater threat to the United States in the long term than is ISIS, making the United States' current single-minded focus on the latter group misguided, a new report is charging.

Al-Nusra is "much more dangerous to the U.S. than the ISIS model in the long run," according to the authors of a report labeling both groups "existential" threats. The report was released last week by the Institute for the Study of War and American Enterprise Institute.

The report criticizes the administration's ISIS-centric strategy, saying, "Any strategy that leaves Jabhat al-Nusra in place will fail to secure the American homeland."

However, the chief of staff of the U.S. Army, Gen. Mark Milley, in a speech Wednesday said that only Russia constituted a potential "existential" threat due to its possession of a large nuclear arsenal capable of striking the U.S.

7, 8, 9

Though for now al-Nusra hasn't undertaken attacks in the West like ISIS has, Kagan said it's just as potent.

"While ISIS is flashier ... both represent an existential threat, both wish to attack the homeland, both seek the mobilization of Muslim communities against the West," she said. In fact, Kagan warned that al Qaeda's Syrian branch represented a longer-term and more intractable threat than ISIS and that targeting al-Nusra would be more difficult than targeting the other group, both of which take advantage of the chaos of the Syrian civil war to expand their reach.

12

Al-Nusra, like ISIS, won't be participating in the talks, but the report argues that al-Nusra is "a spoiler that will almost certainly cause the current strategy in Syria to fail."

14, 15, 16

Al-Nusra emerged in late 2011 during the early days of the Syrian civil war and was initially largely made up of battle-hardened Syrians who had traveled to Iraq to fight U.S. troops during the American engagement there.

It has emerged as one of the most effective groups fighting the Syrian regime and currently controls swaths of northwestern Syria. The group holds "coercive power" over several opposition groups, serving as a sort of "kingmaker," Heras said.

Al-Nusra does "not have the same capacity as ISIS, but its greatest usefulness is as a base of operations" to other elements of al Qaeda that may seek to strike Western targets," Heras said.

19, 20

Kagan said she believes al-Nusra has made a tactical decision not to attack the West for the time being.

"Right now, al-Nusra has decided not to overtly host attack cells because the al Qaeda leadership's priority is preserving success in Syria and avoiding being targeted by the U.S.," she said.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/25/politics/al-qaeda-al-nusra-is-is-threat-experts/>

“What's the difference between ISIS, al-Nusra and the Khorasan Group?”,
2014

27, 28

Like ISIS, al-Nusra Front is trying to establish an Islamic state -- though primarily in Syria.

It's been a formidable force against President Bashar al-Assad's regime. But even though it has helped the Syrian opposition by taking out regime fighters, it has also hurt the moderate opposition by making world leaders hesitant to help rebels.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/24/world/meast/is-is-al-nusra-khorasan-difference/>

“Erdoğan to EU: Al-Nusra also fighting ISIS, why are you calling it terrorist?”, 2016

1ⁿ

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan criticized the European Union (EU) for not designating the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) as “terrorist,” and said “So al-Nusra [Front] is also fighting Daesh [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)], then why do you call it a terrorist organization?”

<https://www.turkishminute.com/2016/06/22/erdogan-al-nusra-also-fighting-isis-call-terrorist/>

“Behind the Syrian War, Al-Qaeda and ISIS Fight for Control of Jihadi Movement”, 2016

2 , 3 , 4

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) started as a more extreme offshoot of al-Qaeda, but al-Qaeda’s central command officially announced in March 2014 that ISIS has no relationship with the leadership of al-Qaeda. The two groups also began fighting around that time, with conflicts taking place both on the ground and ideologically.

In their fight for legitimacy over the jihadi movement, the groups will continue to fight each other, fight for control of Iraq and Syria—and experts warn that these rival extremists could soon turn their attention to launching attacks on the West in attempts to display their capabilities.

The two men behind this fight are Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS; and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of al-Qaeda, and according to author and terrorism researcher Jere Van Dyk, while ISIS is putting on an aggressive show, al-Qaeda still commands more influence.

6, 7 , 8

Van Dyk recently finished researching his upcoming books on the links of al-Qaeda and its affiliates throughout the Middle East and South Asia. While traveling through the

region, he found “al-Qaeda has a lot of influence in the rural areas and among the very poor,” and “among the deeply religious elements.”

The perceptions of ISIS were much different, however. He said ISIS is seen as a “flash in the pan.” They view its leader as just a remnant of Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guard—and when compared to al-Zawahiri, they see al-Baghdadi as having “no intellectual standing” and no moral authority.

This view is part of the reason why ISIS is having trouble spreading beyond the conflict zones in Iraq and Syria. Outside of that, it has only managed to find some influence in the destabilized environment in Libya, and in Afghanistan where it was able to lure some former members of the Taliban with money.

Elsewhere, the situation is much different. Whether it’s the jihadi networks in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, or even Sudan—ISIS has had little luck shaking the foundations laid by al-Qaeda.

12

Al-Qaeda, on the other hand, brings in less cash, but its black market income is more stable. With al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, alone, Van Dyk said he was told by a high-level source in Yemen that the extremists had \$35 million at their disposal, which they had gained mainly through kidnappings in North Africa.

18

Al-Qaeda also has a much different approach than ISIS. He said that while ISIS uses harsh violence for social control—something that has damaged its influence among many local populations—the approach al-Qaeda uses “is more about working by, with, and through local populations.”

31

If Assad falls and free elections are held in Syria, Kan said, the Al-Nusra Front will likely be “elevated to the political class.” Since they actively fought against Assad, they will likely not be seen as “bad guys” in the broad society, and instead will be seen as “patriots and heroes.”

<http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/2018524-behind-the-syrian-war-al-qaeda-and-isis-fight-for-control-of-jihadi-movement/>

“Qatar Is a U.S. Ally. They Also Knowingly Abet Terrorism. What's Going On?”, 2014

1

In a televised interview on September 25, CNN's Christiane Amanpour confronted the emir of Qatar about allegations that his country is not a true ally of the United States. Doha hosts America's largest military base in the Middle East, and at the same time allows private fundraising for American adversaries Al Qaeda and ISIS. Qatar has also been a big source of funding in recent years for U.S.-designated terrorist group Hamas, a spinoff of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. The 34-year-old emir replied to Amanpour: "I'm not in a camp against another camp. ... I have my own way of thinking."

4, 5, 6, 7

The second objective has been to preserve the security of the ruling family and state. Qatar juts out into the Persian Gulf from Saudi Arabia, its much larger, more powerful, and sometimes hostile neighbor, with whom it shares its only land border. Iran, with whom Doha shares the world's largest gas field, is a short distance across Gulf waters. Another large and challenging state in the neighborhood, Iraq, is across the Gulf to the north. Hosting a major U.S. military base since 2003 has provided existential security for Qatar. Courting Islamists from the Muslim Brotherhood to Salafi groups has served as a power amplifier for the country, especially vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia.

Qatar supported Muslim Brotherhood organizations in countries across the region during the Arab uprisings in 2011, believing they represented the wave of the future. From Qatar's perspective, being at the front end of this trend would showcase the country's supposedly progressive leadership.

Backing the Brotherhood represented a continuation of a strategy that was already in place. Doha had hosted Egyptian and, later, Syrian Brotherhood members for decades, including the maverick Egyptian cleric Yusuf al Qaradawi who has lived in Qatar since the 1960s. Qatar had also provided Brotherhood personalities an important means for disseminating their views via the state-funded media channel, Al Jazeera, since the mid-1990s.

Qatar's relationship with the Brotherhood has functioned as an important bulwark against Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has viewed the Brotherhood as a significant domestic irritant since the 1990s, and designated it as a terrorist group in March of this year. Qatar's patronage of and influence over some parts of the group have served as a stick to wield against its more powerful neighbor.

11

Qatar is believed to have directly supported some of the most radical groups fighting in the Syrian war through much of 2013. This may have included Al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, the Nusra Front. Doha would have adopted this approach in order to advance its foreign policy goal of defeating the Assad regime.

14, 15, 16

According to the U.S. Treasury, a number of terrorist financiers have been operating in Qatar. Qatari citizen Abd al Rahman al Nuaymi has served as an interlocutor between Qatari donors and leaders of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI, later renamed ISIS). Nuaymi reportedly oversaw the transfer of two million dollars per month to AQI for a period of time. Nuaymi is also one of several of Qatar-based, Al Qaeda financiers sanctioned by Treasury in recent years. According to some reporting, U.S. officials believe the largest share of private donations supporting ISIS and Al Qaeda-linked groups now comes from Qatar rather than Saudi Arabia.

There has been support among the royal family for radical Islamist groups, including ISIS's predecessor network and Al Qaeda. According to The New York Times, one royal family member, Abdul Karim al Thani, operated a safe house for Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who eventually established and led AQI, when he was traveling between Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s. Abdul Karim also provided Qatari passports and more than one million dollars to finance Zarqawi's network. Another royal family member, Shaykh Abdullah bin Khalid al-Thani, who held top ministerial posts over a period of two decades through mid-2013, sheltered on his farm other al-Qaeda members including Khalid Shaykh Mohammad, and welcomed Osama bin Laden there twice, according to a Congressional Research Service report. Khalid Shaykh Mohammad eventually became the mastermind behind September 11.

There has been support among the royal family for radical Islamist groups, including ISIS's predecessor network and Al Qaeda. According to The New York Times, one royal family member, Abdul Karim al Thani, operated a safe house for Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who eventually established and led AQI, when he was traveling between Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s. Abdul Karim also provided Qatari passports and more than one million dollars to finance Zarqawi's network. Another royal family member, Shaykh Abdullah bin Khalid al-Thani, who held top ministerial posts over a period of two decades through mid-2013, sheltered on his farm other al-Qaeda members including Khalid Shaykh Mohammad, and welcomed Osama bin Laden there twice, according to a Congressional Research Service report. Khalid Shaykh Mohammad eventually became the mastermind behind September 11.

<https://newrepublic.com/article/119705/why-does-qatar-support-known-terrorists>

“Intelligence Break Led U.S. to Tie Envoy Killing to Iraqi Qaeda Cell”,
2003

11 to 18

Mr. Powell said that after Mr. Zarqawi fought against the Soviets, he returned to Afghanistan at the peak of Mr. bin Laden's influence in 2000 and ran a training camp. His leg injury during the allied military campaign in 2001 may have been serious enough for amputation by the time he reached Baghdad.

An expert in poisons and chemical weapons, Mr. Zarqawi is believed to have been providing training to the extremist group Ansar al-Islam. The group is based in northeastern Iraq in territory that is neither under the control of the Baghdad regime nor the main Kurdish groups that have divided up most of northern Iraq.

Soon after Mr. Zarqawi arrived, Mr. Powell said, "nearly two dozen extremists converged on Baghdad and established a base of operations there."

He continued, "These Al Qaeda affiliates, based in Baghdad, now coordinate the movement of people, money and supplies into and throughout Iraq for his network, and they are now operating freely in the capital for more than eight months."

Coalition officials said that no group could operate in this manner without deep engagement with Iraq's ubiquitous intelligence services.

Mr. Powell withheld some critical details today, like the discovery by the intelligence agencies that a member of the royal family in Qatar, an important ally providing air bases and a command headquarters for the American military, operated a safe house for Mr. Zarqawi when he transited the country going in and out of Afghanistan.

The Qatari royal family member was Abdul Karim al-Thani, the coalition official said. The official added that Mr. al-Thani provided Qatari passports and more than \$1 million in a special bank account to finance the network.

Mr. al-Thani, who has no government position, is, according to officials in the gulf, a deeply religious member of the royal family who has provided charitable support for militant causes for years and has denied knowing that his contributions went toward terrorist operations.

Private support from prominent Qataris to Al Qaeda is a sensitive issue that is said to infuriate George J. Tenet, the director of central intelligence. After the Sept. 11 attacks, another senior Qaeda operative, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, who may have been the principal planner of the assault on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, was said by Saudi intelligence officials to have spent two weeks in late 2001 hiding in Qatar, with the help of prominent patrons, after he escaped from Kuwait.

But with Qatar providing the United States military with its most significant air operations center for action against Iraq, the Pentagon has cautioned against a strong diplomatic response from Washington, American and coalition officials say.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/06/international/middleeast/06QAED.htm>

1

“Qatar and Terror”, 2014

7

Qatar is one of the world's smallest states with a miniscule population. A Saudi prince once said that it is made up of "300 people and a TV Channel" (referring to Al Jazeera, based in the capital, Doha). Qatar has only 278,000 citizens and 1.5 million expatriates

who make up 94% of the workforce. Qatar, the world's wealthiest country per capita, also has an unsavory reputation for the mistreatment and effective slavery of much of its workforce.

10

In other spheres, Qatar is the single largest donor to the Brookings Institution, a major U.S. think tank. Payments included \$14.8 million after the former U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, blamed Israel for the failure of the latest round of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks; and it has given money to many universities in the U.S. and Europe.[3] Qatar also hosts eight international university campuses near Doha (Virginia Commonwealth, Weill Cornell, Texas A&M, Carnegie Mellon, Georgetown, Northwestern, HEC Paris, University College London, Calgary), and finances the RAND Policy Trust. It owns expensive properties in London, the Barcelona Football Club, and dabbles in other areas worldwide.

14

Nowhere is this tendency clearer than in Qatar's support for international networks of terrorist organizations. While U.S. planes bomb outposts of ISIS from their Qatar airbase, Qatar is reputed to be sending money to ISIS, Hamas, Libyan jihadists, and others. Of course, the Qataris deny this. Standing beside German Chancellor Angela Merkel on September 27, Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani declared that, "What is happening in Iraq and Syria is extremism and such organizations are partly financed from abroad, but Qatar has never supported and will never support terrorist organizations".

16, 17, 18

The fundamentalist anti-Semitic Islamic preacher, Shaykh Yusuf 'Abd Allah al-Qaradawi, regarded by many as the leading scholar of the Muslim Brotherhood, has been living in Qatar on and off since the 1960s, while preaching a fundamentalist and often pro-terrorist message there through his website, Islam Online, and his Shari'a and Life television show on Al Jazeera. The Qatari government has never sought to rein him in.

Qatar's major international charity, the Qatar Charitable Society (now simply Qatar Charity) has acted as a financier and agency for terrorist outfits in several countries. It

has funded al-Qaeda in Chechnya, Mali and elsewhere, was a key player in the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and funded Syria's Ahfad al-Rasul Brigade. Qatar has also financed terrorists in northern Mali operations, including Ansar Dine, alleged to be linked to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb [North Africa]; and it retains contacts with (and no doubt still funds) al-Qaeda.

According to David Blair and Richard Spencer, writing for London's Daily Telegraph, four branches of the Qatari government handle relations with armed groups in Syria and Libya. These are the Foreign and Defense Ministries, the Intelligence Agency, and the personal office [al-Diwan al-Amiri], of the Emir, who, as we have seen, flatly denies financing terrorism. The Amiri Diwan, as in Kuwait, appears in the lists of government ministries and offices.[5] Of course, Qatar does nothing directly. It prefers to use middlemen and to permit private individuals to do the work for it. Large sums are passed to middlemen in Turkey (itself no stranger to support for terrorism), and this money is used for the purchase of weapons from other countries (notably Croatia). The weapons are then transferred to rebel groups in Syria. It has also been claimed that money owed to British companies operating in Qatar has been siphoned off to Islamic State. This may require some ingenious application of the dark arts of bookkeeping, but it does provide another means of evading condemnation of the state.

21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

Private fundraisers who coordinate donations from individual or corporate donors in Qatar are never detained or subjected to restrictions in Qatar, a privilege that means the transfer of considerable sums to al-Qaeda, Islamic State, Hamas, Jabhat al-Nusra and other Syrian Islamist groups.

The U.S. Treasury has given details of terrorist financiers operating in Qatar. The best known is 'Abd al-Rahman al-Nu'aymi, an academic and businessman who is a key link between Qatari donors and al-Qaeda in Iraq, the predecessor of today's Islamic State. At one time, Nu'aymi transferred \$2 million per month to the organization. He has also sent around \$576,000 to Abu Khalid al-Suri, al-Qaeda's Syrian representative, and \$250,000 to the Somali jihadist group, al-Shabaab.

The U.S. Treasury Department has sanctioned Nu'aymi and other Qatari financiers in recent years. U.S. officials reckon that Qatar has now replaced Saudi Arabia as the

source of the largest private donations to Islamic State and other al-Qaeda affiliates. The Qatari government has taken no steps to detain or punish al-Nu'aymi or anyone else, even though Islamist politics are, in theory, illegal in Qatar.

British Prime Minister David Cameron was warned by many people, before his meeting with the Emir of Qatar, that he had to tackle the issue of Qatar's funding of terrorism. The two men met on October 29. Here is part of the official government news briefing on the meeting:

On international affairs, they discussed the role both countries are playing in the coalition to tackle ISIL, and the importance of all countries working to tackle extremism and support to terrorist organisations. The Prime Minister welcomed the recent legislation passed in Qatar to prevent terrorist funding and looked forward to the swift implementation of these new measures. They also agreed that both countries should do more to share information on groups of concern.

Need one add that among the matters discussed by these world leaders was Qatar's recent £20 billion investment in the U.K., and Cameron's offer of British expertise in construction to assist the Emirate in building the 2022 World Cup events? Money talks, and in supine Western countries just coming out of a major recession, it talks very loudly. Al-Thani walked away from his meeting with Cameron covered in glory for his country's supposed work to defeat Islamist terrorism worldwide.

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4898/qatar-terrorism>

“Islamist uprising in Syria”

4, 5

Following the Syrian occupation of Lebanon in 1976, a number of prominent Syrian officers and government servants, as well as "professional men, doctors, teachers," were assassinated. Most of the victims were Alawis, "which suggested that the assassins had targeted the community" but "no one could be sure who was behind" the killings.[9] The Muslim Brotherhood which had disdain for the Alawites and considered them non-Muslims was most likely responsible for the terror.

It was speculated that the government of Saddam Hussein in Iraq provided logistical and military support to the Brotherhood.[10]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamist_uprising_in_Syria

“Haji Bakr”

1

Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khelifawi, better known by the nom de guerre Haji Bakr, was a senior leader of the militant group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), heading its Military Council and leading its operations in Syria, prior to his killing by Syrian rebels in January 2014.[2][4] Previously a Colonel in the Iraqi Intelligence Service, papers found after his death indicated that al-Khelifawi played a key role in devising the plans ISIL used to conquer and administer territory in Syria and Iraq.[2]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haji_Bakr

“Most Turks Do Not Support Erdogan's Syria Policy”, 2013

13

The United States, as well as Britain and France — which have been keen to arm the secular opposition — also remain concerned that any sophisticated weaponry sent to Syria might fall into the hands of jihadists there and be turned against the West in the future. Much to Ankara’s annoyance, its initial support for radical Islamist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra has thus, in effect, turned into a handicap for the Erdogan government, because the fear that sophisticated weapons might go to the jihadists is limiting Western support to the opposition. If Davutoglu had not been so keen in his support of these groups, and instead had concentrated on the secular and democratic elements in the opposition, he might have made more headway in convincing the West to help the opposition in a meaningful manner.

17

President Obama has, after all, to consider the opposition by the American public to getting involved militarily in Syria. NBC reported on June 17 that a “whopping 70% of

Americans” said in a Pew Research Center poll that they opposed the United States and its allies sending arms to anti-government forces in Syria.

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/06/turkey-erdogan-syria-policy-qusair.html>

“Senior Western official: Links between Turkey and ISIS are now 'undeniable”, 2015

4

NATO member Turkey has long been accused by experts, Kurds, and even Joe Biden of enabling ISIS by turning a blind eye to the vast smuggling networks of weapons and fighters during the ongoing Syrian war.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/links-between-turkey-and-isis-are-now-undeniable-2015-7>

“Assad regime cooperating with Islamic State in Syria”, 2016

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/report-assad-regime-cooperating-with-islamic-state-in-syria/>

“IS Files Reveal Assad's Deals With Militants”, 2016

1

Islamic State and the Assad regime in Syria have been colluding with each other in deals on the battleground, Sky News can reveal.

<http://news.sky.com/story/is-files-reveal-assads-deals-with-militants-10267238>

“Why Assad may be helping Islamic State’s offensive”, 2015

6, 7, 8, 9

There are two main reasons. The first is the region’s importance to the rebel forces. Aleppo’s northern countryside is considered to be one of the largest rebel strongholds with access to Turkey, as well as the rebels' only gateway to the city of Aleppo.

On Feb. 17, the regime tried hard to isolate the northern countryside from the rest of the areas that are under rebel control to blockade the city of Aleppo by attacking the towns of Hardatneen, Retyan and al-Mallah. But, regime forces were met with stiff resistance by the rebels, who considered the battle to be a matter of life and death. As a result, 300 regime troops were killed, according to statements made to Al-Monitor by the former military commander of al-Jabha al-Shamiya (Shamiya Front), Lt. Col. Abu Bakr. IS' advance in Aleppo's northern countryside is sure to weaken the rebels there; as a result, the regime will achieve, with minimal losses, its goal of besieging the rebels in Aleppo city, as the only supply route to it is the Castello road.

The second reason for the recent strikes against rebel areas is that the Assad regime faces two main foes in Syria: IS, against which the United States is leading an international coalition, and rebels backed by a variety of regional powers, most notably Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. In that context, it is only logical that the regime would prefer eliminating an enemy that receives backing, weapons and funds from regional sources, and leave the task of weakening its primary enemy, IS, to the international coalition. Consequently, the regime's presumed elimination of Syrian rebels would force the international community and the factions that back those rebels into allying themselves with Assad to finish off IS.

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/syria-aleppo-regime-army-assad-support-isis-marea-tlalin.html>

“Syria’s Muslim Brotherhood is gaining influence over anti-Assad revolt”,
2012

1, 2, 3 Παράγραφος

After three decades of persecution that virtually eradicated its presence, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has resurrected itself to become the dominant group in the fragmented opposition movement pursuing a 14-month uprising against President Bashar al-Assad.

Exiled Brotherhood members and their supporters hold the biggest number of seats in the Syrian National Council, the main opposition umbrella group. They control its relief

committee, which distributes aid and money to Syrians participating in the revolt. The Brotherhood is also moving on its own to send funding and weapons to the rebels, who continued to skirmish Saturday with Syrian troops despite a month-old U.N.-brokered cease-fire.

The revival marks an extraordinary comeback for an organization that was almost annihilated after the last revolt in Syria, which ended in the killing by government forces of as many as 25,000 people in the city of Hama in 1982. Only those who managed to flee abroad survived the purge.

5

Brotherhood leaders say they have been reaching out to Syria's neighbors, including Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon — as well as to U.S. and European diplomats — to reassure them that they have no intention of dominating a future Syrian political system or establishing any form of Islamist government.

8, 9, 10, 11, 12 , 13 , 14

Of far greater concern to the United States and other Western countries are recent indications that extremists are seeking to muscle their way into the revolt, said Andrew Tabler of the Washington Institute for Near East policy. The double suicide bombing in Damascus last week, in which 55 people died in circumstances reminiscent of the worst of the violence in Iraq, bore the hallmarks of an al-Qaeda attack, deepening suspicions that militants have been relocating from Iraq to Syria.

On Saturday, a group calling itself the al-Nusra Front asserted responsibility for the attack in a statement posted on a jihadist Web site.

The Brotherhood is eager to distance itself from the jihadists, whose radical vision of an Islamic caliphate spanning the globe bears no resemblance to its philosophy.

As the Brotherhood starts distributing weapons inside the country, using donations from individual members and from Persian Gulf states including Qatar and Saudi Arabia, it is going to great lengths to ensure that they don't fall into the hands of extremists, Drobi said.

"We have on the ground our networks, and we make sure they don't distribute arms to those who are not within the streamline of the revolution," Drobi said.

Other leaders also stress the moderation of the group's policies, even by comparison with the original Brotherhood movement in Egypt, to which the Syrian branch is very loosely affiliated.

Syria's Muslim Brotherhood would support NATO intervention to help the opposition topple Assad, and it has published a manifesto outlining its vision of a future democratic state that makes no mention of Islam and enshrines individual liberties, said Mohammed Farouk Tayfour, who is the movement's deputy leader, vice president of the Syrian National Council and head of the council's relief committee, making him perhaps the most powerful figure in the opposition.

16, 17,18

Syria's long history of secularism and its substantial minority population also make it unlikely the Brotherhood would ever achieve the kind of dominance it appears to have won in Egypt or Tunisia, analysts and activists say. Drobi predicted that the Brotherhood would win 25 percent of the vote if democratic elections were to be held.

Even that could be optimistic, experts say. A third of Syria's population belongs to religious or ethnic minorities, among them Christians, Alawites, Shiites and Kurds, who share concerns about the potential rise of Sunni Islamism.

It is in large part a measure of the dysfunction of the rest of the opposition that the Brotherhood has managed to assert itself as the only group with a national reach, at a time when most of the uprising's internal leadership is atomized around local committees that don't coordinate, said Yezid Sayigh of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut.

26, 27

The Muslim Brothers have resources, and they get help from Saudi Arabia and the gulf states," said Mousab al-Hamadi, an activist in Hama with the secular Local Coordination Committees. "They have a long history behind them, whereas other groups like us are newly born."

"From the point of view of religion, most Syrians don't accept political Islam," he added. "But the people here are still Muslim, and they are still conservative, so I think the Muslim Brotherhood will become the biggest political power in Syria after the departure of the Assad regime. And I will be the biggest loser."

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/syrias-muslim-brotherhood-is-gaining-influence-over-anti-assad-revolt/2012/05/12/gIQAtfoJLU_story.html

“Governmental positions on the Iraq War prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq : Turkey”

Turkey originally showed reservations, fearing that a power vacuum after Saddam's defeat might have given rise to a Kurdish state [14] On 1 March 2003 the Turkish parliament failed narrowly to approve a government motion to permit the deployment in Turkey for six months of 62,000 US troops, 255 jet aircraft, and 65 helicopters. [15]

In December 2002, Turkey moved approximately 15,000 soldiers to its border with Iraq. [16] The Turkish General Staff stated that this move was in light of recent developments and did not indicate an attack was imminent. In January 2003, the Turkish foreign minister, Yasar Yakis, said he was examining documents from the time of the Ottoman Empire in order to determine whether Turkey had a claim to the oil fields around the northern Iraqi cities of Mosul and Kirkuk.

In late January 2003, Turkey invited at least five other regional countries to a "'last-chance' meeting to avert a US-led war against Iraq. The group urged neighboring Iraq to continue cooperating with the UN inspections, and publicly stated that "military strikes on Iraq might further destabilize the Middle East region".

In the end, Turkey did not grant access to its land and harbours as asked for by U.S. officials because the Grand National Assembly of Turkey voted against this proposal. [17] Nonetheless, Turkey was named by the Bush Administration as a part of the "Coalition of the Willing."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governmental_positions_on_the_Iraq_War_prior_to_the_2003_invasion_of_Iraq#Turkey

“How Isis came to be”, 2014

3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Principally, Isis is the product of a genocide that continued unabated as the world stood back and watched. It is the illegitimate child born of pure hate and pure fear – the result of 200,000 murdered Syrians and of millions more displaced and divorced from their hopes and dreams. Isis's rise is also a reminder of how Bashar al-Assad's Machiavellian embrace of al-Qaida would come back to haunt him.

Facing Assad's army and intelligence services, Lebanon's Hezbollah, Iraq's Shia Islamist militias and their grand patron, Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Syria's initially peaceful protesters quickly became disenchanted, disillusioned and disenfranchised – and then radicalised and violently militant.

The Shia Islamist axis used chemical weapons, artillery and barrel bombs to preserve its crescent of influence. Syria's Sunni Arab revolutionaries in turn sought international assistance, and when the world refused, they embraced a pact with the devil, al-Qaida.

With its fiercely loyal army of transnational jihadis, al-Qaida once again gained a foothold in the heart of the Middle East. Fuelled by the hate and fear engendered by images of dismembered children or women suffering from the effects of chemical weapons, disaffected youth from around the world rushed to Syria, fuelling an ever more violent race to the bottom.

Next door in Iraq, an emboldened Nouri al-Maliki waged his own sectarian campaign to consolidate power, betraying promises to his political partners to share it around. Within days of being welcomed at the WhiteHouse and praised by Barack Obama for his leadership, Maliki returned to Baghdad to mastermindthe arrest of his principal Sunni rival, vice-president Tariq al-Hashimi.

Supported by Iran and armed with US-made Humvees, M-16s, and M1A1 tanks, Maliki's forces closed in on Hashimi, only to see him flee to Kurdistan. Dozens of his guards were imprisoned on terrorism charges. At least one of them died under interrogation.

9

Facing mass unrest, Iraq's Sunni Arab provincial councils voted for semi-autonomous rule like that of the neighbouring Kurdistan region. Maliki blocked the implementation of a referendum through bureaucratic ploys, in contravention of Iraq's constitution.

12

Despite pleas from the highest levels in Washington, Maliki's government did virtually nothing to halt the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' flights to resupply the Assad regime with thousands of tons of military hardware and ammunition. Meanwhile, a Shia Islamist ally of Maliki privately conceded to me last year that senior officials in the Iraqi government were turning a blind eye – or even actively supporting – the dispatch of thousands of Iraqi Shia fighters to participate in the spiralling Shia-Sunni holy war in Syria.

14, 15, 16, 17

Ironically, al-Qaida's wholesale introduction into Iraq came at the hands of Assad's regime. From 2005 until the end of the American occupation of Iraq, Assad's military intelligence services and their Iranian backers sought to defeat the US forces by training, financing and arming al-Qaida operatives inside Syria and dispatching them across the border to foment chaos and destruction.

General David Petraeus and other senior American officials warned Assad that he was igniting a fire that would eventually burn his house down, but Damascus did nothing to stop the flow of fighters, culminating in a crippling blow to Maliki's government the day Iraq's foreign and finance ministries were bombed. Maliki publicly condemned his future ally in Damascus for the attack.

And so, Syria's unravelling spilled into Iraq, and vice versa. Powerful regional tribes such as the Shammar and Anezah, faced with countless dead and persecuted members in both countries, banded together with former Iraqi and Syrian military officers, embracing Isis jihadis as their frontline shock troops. Cash poured in from sympathetic donors around the region.

Iraq's four Sunni Arab provinces fell within days, entire Iraqi army divisions evaporated, and hundreds of millions of dollars worth of advanced American military equipment was seized by Isis and its allies. Fuelled by what was increasingly a regional Sunni-Shia proxy war, Iraq and Syria had become incubators for transnational jihad and religious hate.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/22/syria-iraq-incubators-isis-jihad>

“Russia’s approach to ISIL: the hidden benefit of evil”

1, 2

Many Western observers relate ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) with the resurrection of medieval barbarians. But it could actually be more usefully compared with revolutionary movements of the past, notably the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. ISIL shares with the Bolsheviks the peculiar “internationalism” that implies it could absorb people regardless of ethnicity, race or place of origin. Paradoxically, this aspect of ISIL has had positive implications for Russia.

It has served to stimulate the disintegration of Russia’s homegrown Islamists’ resistance with many members moving to the Middle East, reducing the internal threat. Moreover, it has provided Moscow with the opportunity to engage in the Middle East where – despite the Kremlin’s proclamations – its interests are only indirectly related to the fight against ISIL.

<http://www.nato.int/docu/Review/2015/ISIL/Russia-Syria-Putin-ISIL-Chechnya-Middle-East/EN/index.htm>

“Syria: Russian PM warns of world war if troops sent in”, 2016

2, 3, 4, 5

Medvedev was quoted as saying in an interview published late on Thursday by the German newspaper Handelsblatt that "a ground operation draws everyone taking part in it into a war".

When asked about a recent proposal from Saudi Arabia to send ground troops into Syria, the Russian prime minister answered that "the Americans and our Arab partners must consider whether or not they want a permanent war".

Al Jazeera's Rory Challands, reporting from Moscow, said Medvedev's comments were an explicit warning to the United States and its regional allies, including Saudi Arabia.

"He basically told them to back off on sending troops because if they did, this might result in some sort of interminable or even a world war," Challands said.

7, 8

US defence chief Ashton Carter, meanwhile, welcomed a commitment from Saudi Arabia to expand its role with ground troops in Syria against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group.

At a gathering of more than two dozen defence ministers at NATO headquarters, Carter said on Friday that the United Arab Emirates, a key ally, agreed to send special forces soldiers to Syria to assist in the development of local Sunni Arab fighters focused on recapturing Raqqa, ISIL's de facto capital.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/02/syria-russian-pm-warns-world-war-troops-160212074839609.html>

“ISIS and the ‘Loser Effect’”, 2016

5

And then Islamic State’s Icarus flight suddenly stalled. By one estimate, since January 2015, ISIS has lost 22 percent of its territory, including the cities of Tikrit and Ramadi in Iraq, as well as strategic areas of northern Syria, which has limited the group’s capacity to sell oil across the Turkish border. In recent months, ISIS has largely been playing defense: It hasn’t launched a major offensive since last summer. It has been hit by the death of key commanders and an uptick in defections. U.S. officials claim that ISIS’s ranks are at their lowest level since 2014.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/04/is-isis-losing/480336/>

“BIRTH OF THE ISIS”

4

In Saddam's days the Armed Forces, made up almost exclusively of Sunnis, counted roughly 500 thousand men in their ranks. Additionally, Baath party supporters in Ministries and other public structures were in the millions. Bremer's directives landed a few million Iraqi families on the sidewalk and – this is the dangerous part – forced many

to join the ranks of the opposition while the ones with military know-how tried to find a military solution to the social conflict. These are the premises for the birth of the warfare against the new Shiite leadership in Baghdad.

9, 10

Zarqawi's terrorist experience ended on June 7, 2006, when a US airplane targeted his refuge in Baquba, north of Baghdad. Together with him died his fourth wife and some of his lieutenants. The killing of Abu Musab al Zarqawi would not, however, remove the founding element of the Jihadist rebellion: the resentment of the Sunni, who were by then united under a Salafite flag against the Shiite administration in Baghdad. This is why in 2006 the ISI (Islamic State in Iraq) was born. Only later, in April 2013, will the final "S" be added; the "S" that stands for Syria or "Sham": Damascus.

The ISI was initially headed by Abu Omar al Baghdadi, aka Hamid Dawud Mohamed Khalil al Zawi. His vice was an Egyptian national, Abu Ayyub al Masri, who also went by a pseudonym, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir. The ISI was not made up of Zarqawi's group alone, it had absorbed several smaller factions, such as the "Council of the Shura of the Mujaheddin" and the "Jund al Sahaba" (The army of the companions of the Prophet). Abu Bakr al Baghdadi became a member of the ISI in virtue of his militancy in the Coordination Committee of the Council of the Shura of the Mujaheddin and thanks to the people he had met in Camp Bucca. Al Baghdadi's strengths were an in-depth knowledge of the Islamic doctrine, which he had studied in a doctorate at the Islamic University of Baghdad, and a strong background in Jihadist theory, which was the fruit of his mingling with the Muslim Brothers and of his reading the works of the "bad teachers" of the holy war: Abu Mohammed al Maqdisi, Sayyid Qubt, Abu Mohammed al Mufti al Aali.

12

On April 18, 2010, a joint US-Iraqi operation in the region of Anbar put an end to the lives and times of the leaders of the ISI, Abu Omar and Abu Ayyub. It is then that Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, who went by the name of Abu Dua, took over. Not everyone was agreeable with his promotion, but then again, he did descend from the tribe of Quraish, just like the Prophet.

http://www.invisible-dog.com/isis_birth_eng.html

“DID GEORGE W. BUSH CREATE ISIS?”, 2015

1, 2

The exchange started like this: at the end of Jeb Bush’s town-hall meeting in Reno, Nevada, on Wednesday, a college student named Ivy Ziedrich stood up and said that she had heard Bush blame the growth of isis on President Obama, in particular on his decision to withdraw American troops from Iraq in 2011. The origins of isis, Ziedrich said, lay in the decision by Bush’s brother, in 2003, to disband the Iraqi Army following the toppling of Saddam Hussein’s government.

“It was when thirty thousand individuals who were part of the Iraqi military were forced out—they had no employment, they had no income, and they were left with access to all of the same arms and weapons.... Your brother created isis,” she said.

4

Jeb replied by repeating his earlier criticism of President Obama: that Iraq had been stable until American troops had departed. “When we left Iraq, security had been arranged,” Bush said. The removal of American troops had created a security vacuum that isis exploited. “The result was the opposite occurred. Immediately, that void was filled.”

6

Here is what happened: In 2003, the U.S. military, on orders of President Bush, invaded Iraq, and nineteen days later threw out Saddam’s government. A few days after that, President Bush or someone in his Administration decreed the dissolution of the Iraqi Army. This decision didn’t throw “thirty thousand individuals” out of a job, as Ziedrich said—the number was closer to ten times that. Overnight, at least two hundred and fifty thousand Iraqi men—armed, angry, and with military training—were suddenly humiliated and out of work.

7, 8, 9

This was probably the single most catastrophic decision of the American venture in Iraq. In a stroke, the Administration helped enable the creation of the Iraqi insurgency. Bush Administration officials involved in the decision—like Paul Bremer and Walter

Slocombe—argued that they were effectively ratifying the reality that the Iraqi Army had already disintegrated.

This was manifestly not true. I talked to American military commanders who told me that leaders of entire Iraqi divisions (a division has roughly ten thousand troops) had come to them for instructions and expressed a willingness to cooperate. In fact, many American commanders argued vehemently at the time that the Iraqi military should be kept intact—that disbanding it would turn too many angry young men against the United States. But the Bush White House went ahead.

Many of those suddenly unemployed Iraqi soldiers took up arms against the United States. We'll never know for sure how many Iraqis would have stayed in the Iraqi Army—and stayed peaceful—had it remained intact. But the evidence is overwhelming that former Iraqi soldiers formed the foundation of the insurgency.

11, 12, 13

During the course of the war, Al Qaeda in Iraq grew to be the most powerful wing of the insurgency, as well as the most violent and the most psychotic. They drove truck bombs into mosques and weddings and beheaded their prisoners. But, by the time the last American soldiers had departed, in 2011, the Islamic State of Iraq, as it was then calling itself, was in a state of near-total defeat. The combination of the Iraqi-led “awakening,” along with persistent American pressure, had decimated the group and pushed them into a handful of enclaves.

Indeed, by 2011 the situation in Iraq—as former Governor Bush said—was relatively stable. “Relatively” is the key word here. Iraq was still a violent place, but nowhere near as violent as it had been. The Iraqi government was being run by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, a fervent Al Qaeda foe and ostensible American ally.

But, as the last Americans left Iraq, there came the great uprising in Syria that pitted the country's vast Sunni majority against the ruthless regime of Bashar al-Assad. Syria quickly dissolved into anarchy. Desperate and seeing an opportunity, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq, dispatched a handful of soldiers to Syria, where, in a matter of months, they had gathered an army of followers and had begun attacking the Assad regime. Suddenly, Baghdadi's group—which had been

staggering toward the grave only months before—was regaining strength. In 2013, the I.S.I. became the Islamic State of Iraq in Syria. isis was born.

15, 16, 17, 18

In this sense, Ziedrich is right again, at least notionally: some of the men fighting in isis were put out of work by the American occupiers in 2003. Still, it's not clear—and it will never be clear—how many of these Iraqis might have remained peaceful had the Americans kept the Iraqi Army intact. One of the Iraqis closest to Baghdadi was Ibrahim Izzat al-Douri, a senior official in Saddam's government until 2003. (Douri was reported killed last month—it's still not clear if he was or not.) It's hard to imagine that Douri—or any other hardcore member of Saddam's Baath Party—would have ever willingly taken part in an American occupation, whether he had a job or not. So, in this sense, Ziedrich is overstating the case. While it's true that George W. Bush took actions that helped enable the creation of the Iraqi insurgency, and that some leaders of the insurgency formed isis, it's not true that he "created" isis. And there's a good argument to be made that an insurgency would have formed following the invasion of Iraq even if President Bush had kept the Iraqi Army together. He just helped to make the insurgency bigger.

But let's get to Governor Bush's assertion—that Iraq went down the tubes because of President Obama's decision to pull out all American forces, and that Obama could easily have left behind a residual force that would have kept the peace.

I took up this issue last year in a [Profile of Maliki](#), the Iraqi leader we left in place. Maliki didn't really want any Americans to stay in Iraq, and Obama didn't, either. But—and this is a crucial point—it seems possible that, if Obama had pushed Maliki harder, the United States could have retained a small force of soldiers there in noncombat roles. More than a few Americans and Iraqis told me this. They blame Obama for not trying harder. "You just had this policy vacuum and this apathy," Michael Barbero, the commander of American forces in Iraq in 2011, told me, describing the Obama White House.

So, on this, Governor Bush isn't entirely accurate, but makes a good point: the Obama Administration might have been able to keep some forces in Iraq if it had really tried.

This much is clear: after 2011, with no Americans on the ground, Maliki was free to indulge his worst sectarian impulses, and he rapidly and ruthlessly repressed Iraq's Sunni minority, imprisoning thousands of young men on no charges, thereby radicalizing the Sunnis who weren't in prison. When, in June, 2014, isis came rolling in, anything seemed better than Maliki to many of Iraq's Sunnis.

<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/did-george-w-bush-create-isis>

“Syria: The story of the conflict”, 2016

1, 2, 3

Pro-democracy protests erupted in March 2011 in the southern city of Deraa after the arrest and torture of some teenagers who painted revolutionary slogans on a school wall. After security forces opened fire on demonstrators, killing several, more took to the streets.

The unrest triggered nationwide protests demanding President Assad's resignation. The government's use of force to crush the dissent merely hardened the protesters' resolve. By July 2011, hundreds of thousands were taking to the streets across the country.

Opposition supporters eventually began to take up arms, first to defend themselves and later to expel security forces from their local areas.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>

“U.S.-backed Syria rebels routed by fighters linked to al-Qaeda”, 2014

2, 3

Moderate rebels who had been armed and trained by the United States either surrendered or defected to the extremists as the Jabhat al-Nusra group, affiliated with al-Qaeda, swept through the towns and villages the moderates controlled in the northern province of Idlib, in what appeared to be a concerted push to vanquish the moderate Free Syrian Army, according to rebel commanders, activists and analysts.

Other moderate fighters were on the run, headed for the Turkish border as the extremists closed in, heralding a significant defeat for the rebel forces Washington had been counting on as a bulwark against the Islamic State.

6, 7

Jabhat al-Nusra has long been regarded by Syrians as less radical than the breakaway Islamic State faction, and it had participated alongside moderate rebels in battles against the Islamic State earlier this year. But it is also on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations and is the only group in Syria that has formally declared its allegiance to the mainstream al-Qaeda leadership.

A Jabhat al-Nusra base was one of the first targets hit when the United States launched its air war in Syria in September, and activists said the tensions fueled by that attack had contributed to the success of the group's push against the moderate rebels.

11, 12

Among the groups whose bases were overrun in the assault was Harakat Hazm, the biggest recipient of U.S. assistance offered under a small-scale, covert CIA program launched this year, including the first deliveries of U.S.-made TOW antitank missiles. The group's headquarters outside the village of Khan Subbul was seized by Jabhat al-Nusra overnight Saturday, after rebel fighters there surrendered their weapons and fled without a fight, according to residents in the area.

Hussam Omar, a spokesman for Harakat Hazm, refused to confirm whether American weaponry had been captured by the al-Qaeda affiliate because, he said, negotiations with Jabhat al-Nusra are underway.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-backed-syria-rebels-routed-by-fighters-linked-to-al-qaeda/2014/11/02/7a8b1351-8fb7-4f7e-a477-66ec0a0aaf34_story.html

“Turkey and Saudi Arabia alarm the West by backing Islamist extremists the Americans had bombed in Syria”,2015

1, 2 , 3

Turkey and Saudi Arabia are actively supporting a hardline coalition of Islamist rebels against Bashar al-Assad's regime that includes al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, in a move that has alarmed Western governments.

The two countries are focusing their backing for the Syrian rebels on the combined Jaish al-Fatah, or the Army of Conquest, a command structure for jihadist groups in Syria that includes Jabhat al-Nusra, an extremist rival to Isis which shares many of its aspirations for a fundamentalist caliphate.

The decision by the two leading allies of the West to back a group in which al-Nusra plays a leading role has alarmed Western governments and is at odds with the US, which is firmly opposed to arming and funding jihadist extremists in Syria's long-running civil war.

6, 7, 8, 9

Relations had been fraught between the Turkish president and the late King Abdullah, primarily because of Turkey's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which the Saudi monarchy considers a threat. But Mr Erdogan stressed to Saudi officials that the lack of Western action in Syria, especially the failure to impose a "no-fly zone", meant that regional powers now needed to come together and take the lead to help the opposition.

The Army of Conquest – which also numbers the extremist groups Ahrar al-Sham and Jund al-Aqsa among its seven members – has a command centre in Idlib, northern Syria. Turkish officials admit giving logistical and intelligence support to the command headquarters. Although they deny giving direct help to al-Nusra, they acknowledge that the group would be beneficiaries.

They also acknowledge links with Ahrar al-Sham, which is held to be extremist by the US, but has fought against Isis, as has al-Nusra in some parts of Syria. Turkish officials claim that bolstering Ahrar al-Sham will weaken the influence of al-Nusra.

Material support – arms and money – have been coming from the Saudis, say rebels and officials, with the Turks facilitating its passage. The border villages of Guvecci, Kuyubasi, Hacipasa, Besaslan, Kusakli and Bukulmez are the favoured routes, according to rebel sources.

11, 12

There have been complaints from the Saudis that the US, needing the support of Shia Iran against Isis in Iraq, and hopeful of an accord over Iran's nuclear programme, is becoming less interested in the removal of Tehran's client regime in Damascus.

Further evidence of dissatisfaction over the US approach among Sunni states came yesterday with the news that King Salman has withdrawn from a summit with Barack Obama at the White House on the Iran nuclear talks this week: he will be represented instead by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef. Of the six heads of Gulf States invited, only the emirs of Qatar and Kuwait are now due to attend.

17, 18, 19

A key sign of rapprochement between Turkey and Saudi Arabia has been over the Muslim Brotherhood. The Saudis welcomed the coup against Mohamed Morsi's government in Egypt, but the group has been staunchly supported by Turkey since Mr Erdogan came to power. Now, say diplomats and officials, Saudi Arabia has accepted a continued role for the Brotherhood in the Syrian opposition.

Rebel fighters in Syria claim that after Western-sponsored groups lost ground to al-Nusra last year, Washington began to cut off funding for most of the supposedly moderate groups. Harakat al-Hazm, originally the most favoured of these, had its cash funding halved; the rebel Farouq Brigade had all funds cut off.

Abdulatif al-Sabbagh, an officer with Ahrar al-Sham, said: "The Americans backed people who said they were revolutionaries, but these people were corrupt and incompetent... Jaish al-Fatah is successful is because we all fight together. But we are all against Daesh [Isis] just as we are against Bashar. The Americans are bombing Daesh but doing nothing against the regime, that's why we have got together to fight them."

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-crisis-turkey-and-saudi-arabia-shock-western-countries-by-supporting-anti-assad-jihadists-10242747.html>

“ISIS leaders remain in close contact with Ankara – Lavrov”, 2016

2, 3

The leaders of Islamic State maintain a constant liaison with the Turkish government, working out a new approach to the war in Syria as the Russian Air Force cuts off traditional smuggling routes, says Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

The airstrikes of the Russian Air Force in Syria have severely disrupted “traditional smuggling routes,” so the Turks are discussing in all seriousness creation of “IS-free zones” in Syria.

<https://www.rt.com/news/332026-turkey-talks-isis-lavrov/>

“Turkey to propose cooperation with Russia on fighting ISIS”, 2016

1, 2, 3 , 4

Turkey said on Monday it wanted to cooperate with Moscow in combating Islamic State in Syria but denied having suggested it might allow Russia to use its Incirlik Air Base, near the Syrian frontier.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan last week expressed regret over last year's shooting down of a Russian warplane, with the loss of the pilot.

Moscow, which had broken off virtually all economic ties and banned tourists from visiting Turkish resorts, pledged in return to help rebuild relations.

In an interview with Turkish state television on Sunday, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu had appeared to suggest Ankara could open up Incirlik to Russia, a move that could raise concern among Turkey's NATO partners already using the base, including the United States.

<http://uk.businessinsider.com/turkey-to-propose-cooperation-with-russia-on-fighting-isis-2016-7>

“Into the Quagmire: Turkey’s Frustrated Syria Policy”, 2012

https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Middle%20East/1212bp_phillips.pdf

“Al-Nusra Front : Split with ISIL 2013”

By January 2013, Nusra was a formidable force with strong popular support in Syria,[91] and it continued to grow in strength during the following months.[102] On 8 April 2013, the leader of the then Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,

released a recorded audio message on the Internet, in which he announced that Jabhat al-Nusra was part of his network,^[103] and that he was merging Jabhat al-Nusra with ISI into one group, "Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham" (ISIL), under his command.^{[91][104]} Al-Baghdadi also said that Abu Mohammad al-Julani had been dispatched by the ISI to Syria to meet with pre-existing cells in the country and that the ISI had provided Jabhat al-Nusra with the plans and strategy needed for the Syrian Civil War, and had been funding their activities.^[104]

The next day al-Julani rejected the merger and affirmed the group's allegiance to al-Qaeda and its leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri.^[91] Al-Julani was quoted as saying, "We inform you that neither the al-Nusra command nor its consultative council, nor its general manager were aware of this announcement. It reached them via the media and if the speech is authentic, we were not consulted."^[105] Nusra then split, with some members, particularly foreign fighters, followed Baghdadi's edict and joined ISIL, while others stayed loyal to Golani or left to join other Islamist brigades.^{[91][106][107]}

In May 2013, Reuters reported that al-Baghdadi had travelled from Iraq to Syria's Aleppo Governorate province and begun recruiting members of al-Nusra.^[108] Sometime in May 2013, al-Julani was reportedly injured by an airstrike conducted by the Syrian government.^[109] In June 2013, Al Jazeera reported that it had obtained a letter written by al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, addressed to both Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abu Mohammad al-Julani, in which he ruled against the merger of the two organisations and appointed an emissary to oversee relations between them and put an end to tensions.^[110] Later in the month, an audio message from al-Baghdadi was released in which he rejected al-Zawahiri's ruling and declared that the merger of the two organisations into the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant was going ahead. This sequence of events caused much confusion and division amongst members of al-Nusra.^[107]

In November 2013, Al-Zawahiri ordered the disbandment of ISIL and said al-Nusra should be considered the (only) al-Qaeda branch in Syria,^[49] and bestowed the title "Tanzim Qa'edat Al-Jihad fi Bilad Al-Sham" ("the Qae'dat Al-Jihad organization in the Levant") on them, officially integrating Nusra into al-Qaeda's global network.^[47]

Some units of al-Nusra began taking part in clashes against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in late 2013.[111]

In February 2014, after efforts to end the dispute between ISIL and Nusra had failed, al-Qaeda formally dissociated itself from its onetime affiliate ISIL, leaving Jabhat al-Nusra the sole representative of al-Qaeda in Syria.[112] In the same month, al-Julani threatened to go to war with ISIL over their suspected role in the killing of senior Ahrar ash-Sham commander Abu Khaled al-Souri. Al-Julani gave ISIL five days to submit evidence that they were innocent of the attack to three imprisoned Jihadist clerics, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Abu Qatada al-Falastini, and Suleiman al-Alwan.[113] On 16 April 2014, ISIL killed al-Nusra's Idlib chief Abu Mohammad al-Ansari together with his family, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported.[114] In May 2014, open fighting broke out between ISIL and al-Nusra in Deir ez-Zor Governorate, leaving hundreds dead on both sides.[115]

By July 2014, al-Nusra had largely been expelled from Deir ez-Zor Governorate.[116] Also in July, an audio recording attributed to al-Julani appeared online, in which he said that al-Nusra planned to establish an Islamic emirate in the areas of Syria where they had a presence. A statement issued on 12 July 2014 by al-Nusra's media channel affirmed the authenticity of the recording, but stated that they had not yet declared the establishment of an emirate.[117][118][119][120]

In June 2015, al-Julani stated in regards to ISIL: "There is no solution between us and them in the meantime, or in the foreseeable future [...] We hope they repent to God and return to their senses ... if not, then there is nothing but fighting between us." [64]

On 12 February 2015, SITE Intelligence Group cited rumours that Nusra leader al-Julani had plans to disassociate from al-Qaeda.[121]

On 4 March, "sources within and close to al-Nusra" reportedly had said to Reuters that in the past months Qatar and other Gulf states had talked with Nusra leader Abu Mohammad al-Julani and encouraged him to abandon al-Qaeda, promising funding to Nusra once that break-up was carried out. An official close to the Qatari government had confirmed to Reuters that Qatar wanted Nusra to become purely Syrian and disconnect from al-Qaeda, after which Qatar would start to support Nusra with money and supplies. Muzamjer al-Sham, reportedly a 'prominent jihadi close to Nusra' had said that Nusra

would soon merge with Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar and other small jihadi brigades and disengage from al-Qaeda, but that not all Nusra emirs had yet agreed to that.[53]

On 9 March 2015, in a statement issued on Twitter, al-Nusra denied "completely all reports of a meeting with Qatari" and reports of a break-up with al-Qaeda. Expert Thomas Pierret at the University of Edinburgh assumed that Qatar was trying to force the hand of Al-Nusra with this "leak" about a split, and said a break with Al-Qaeda was very unlikely. French expert on jihadism Romain Caillet agreed: "The overwhelming majority of Al-Nusra members want to stay in al-Qaeda, particularly foreign fighters who represent at least one-third of the organisation".[54]

But Abu Maria al-Qahtani, the commander of al-Nusra in Deir ez-Zor province, still strongly advocated a split with al-Qaeda.[56] Muhamed Nabih Osman, leading a charitable organisation for former Assad prisoners, said to website The Daily Beast on 4 May 2015: "I think it will happen soon. You have to understand that al-Nusra consists of two very different parts and that one part, mostly local fighters, are not interested in global jihad".[56]

On 7 May 2015, a Turkish official said that Turkey and Saudi Arabia were bolstering Ahrar al-Sham at Nusra's expense, hoping that al-Sham's rise puts pressure on Nusra to renounce its ties to al-Qaeda and open itself to outside help.[122]

A "well-connected Syrian Islamist" cited in May 2015 by The Huffington Post said: "There are now two main currents... the conservatives are keen on keeping ties to Al-Qaeda and the others are more inclined towards the new Syria-focused approach". Another "Islamist official from Damascus" is cited: "Nusra's disengagement from al-Qaeda would be good for the revolution, but Jabhat al-Nusra will always be in dire need of al-Qaeda's name to keep its foreign fighters away from IS. Most Jabhat foreign fighters will never accept to fight and die for what looks like an Islamic national project." [55]

In late July 2016, through various sources, the Middle East Eye claimed that an organizational split from al-Qaeda is "imminent", with the proposal reportedly been approved by AQ leaders and proposed a new name called "Jabhat Fatah al-Sham", or the "Conquest of the Levant Front". However, the sources claim that the move will not affect al-Nusra al-Qaeda ideology and its plan to commit attacks on the West.[123]

External Support

At least one Arab government[192] has accused Qatar of helping al-Nusra.[193] According to the Al-Ahram Weekly, "The Saudis and Qataris are to provide funding for 40 per cent of the [Army of Conquest] coalition's needs".[194] JaN has been cited as an example of groups in the Syrian Civil War that Saudi Arabia has supported that are "most in line with Wahhabi beliefs".[2] The US Government has been sending weapons to rebels in Syria since at least late 2013,[195] and perhaps as early as 2012,[196] during the beginning phases of the conflict. These weapons have been reportedly falling into hands of extremists, such as al-Nusra and ISIL.[197][198][199] al-Nusra has also been materially supported by multiple foreign fighters. Most of these fighters are from Europe and the Middle East, as pipelines to Syria from those locations are better established and navigable.[200] However, as of November 2013, there were also 6 publicly disclosed cases of American citizens and permanent residents who joined or attempted to join al-Nusrah in 2013 alone.[201]

The Independent reported that Saudi Arabia and Turkey "are focusing their backing for the Syrian rebels on the combined Jaish al-Fatah, or the Army of Conquest, a command structure for jihadist groups in Syria that includes Jabhat al-Nusra." [202]

The Pentagon confirmed in September 2015 that a small group of US-trained New Syrian Forces rebels gave six pickup trucks and a portion of their ammunition to al-Nusra Front in exchange for safe passage.[203]

Qatari Support

The Emir of Qatar publicly admitted, in an interview with Christiane Amanpour, that he doesn't always see eye to eye with American terrorist designations: "I know that in America and some countries they look at some movements as terrorist movements. ... But there are differences. There are differences that some countries and some people that any group which comes from Islamic background are terrorists. And we don't accept that." [204] It has been suggested that one of the designated groups that the Emir spoke of in this interview at CNN was the Al-Nusra Front.[205] According to the Consortium Against Terror Finance (CATF), Qatar has been able to get away with funding Al Nusra, despite their terrorist designation, through Kidnapping for Ransom.[205] Al Nusra has, thus far, kidnapped a diverse group of people from nationalities that span the globe. They have been involved in kidnapping people from Turkey, Fiji, Lebanon, Syria, and Italy

among others. In each occasion, Qatar engages in a substantial financial agreement with Al Nusra in exchange for hostages. CATF suggests that the U.S. turns a blind eye to Qatar's funding of Al Nusra because Al Nusra is one of the only groups that poses a plausible threat to both ISIS and Assad.[205] According to the Institute for the Study of War, the reason why Al Nusra is the only plausible threat is because of Qatar's funding: "Jabhat al-Nusra has become the best-armed force among the opposition groups. It has been at the tip of the spear in operations in Eastern Syria, Aleppo, and Damascus. Its combat proficiency and relatively greater access to materiel and funding have led other opposition groups to tolerate its participation in military operations across the country." [206]

Qatar even managed the negotiations with al-Nusra Front that ultimately led to American writer Peter Theo Curtis's release. Suggesting how happy the country is with its relationship to Al Nusra, Qatari Intelligence Chief Ghanim Khalifa al-Kubaisi was said to have sent a contact a text with the words "Done," — and a thumbs up emoticon — after Curtis's release was completed.[207]

According to The Fiscal Times, Qatar has great influence over the group that goes beyond ransom payments. In many cases, Qatar acts as a political mediator between Al Nusra and other countries like Lebanon:[208] "A prisoner swap between the Lebanese government and al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, Al-Nusra Front in early December showed how powerful the group has become on the ground. The deal released 16 Lebanese soldiers and police officers who were captured during a joint ISIS-al-Nusra operation along with 29 civilians, some of whom are known terrorists." [208] Indeed, Qatar's mediation between Al Nusra and Lebanon ultimately guaranteed al-Nusra freedom of movement inside what was once a safe haven in Lebanon's Hamid valley, bordering Syria, giving Al Nusra access to the Lebanese town of Arsal.[208]

But one Diplomat goes so far as to suggest that, beyond the scope of mediation and paying ransom, "They [Qatar] are partly responsible for Jabhat al-Nusra having money and weapons and everything they need." The diplomat even goes on to say that while Qatar hasn't directly funded ISIS, it is responsible for the fact that ISIS gained Al Nusra weapons as members of Al Nusra are known to defect to ISIS.[209]

Qatar's support of Al Nusra has been highly criticized in both U.S. and U.K media. Indeed, Foreign Policy goes so far as to suggest that Qatar's support for Al Nusra is just one more example of its hand in further destabilizing the entire region.[207] As a result, Qatar had to suppress some of the more overt Al Nusra fund-raising efforts launched publicly by its citizens. It has been suggested that while Qatar supports Al Nusra, it does so in a way to try and not alienate its Western allies.[210] Fellow Gulf countries Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain have publicly rebuked Qatar for its support of political Islamists like Al Nusra across the Middle East.[207]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Nusra_Front#Split_with_ISIL .282013.29